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# PERIODS OF POLISH LITERARY HISTORY

BEING THE ILCHESTER LECTURES  
FOR THE YEAR 1923

BY

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## PREFACE

THE present book consists, in substance, of the Ilchester Lectures on Slavonic to the University of Oxford in February 1923.

The author having chosen for his subject the periods of Polish Literature which belong to history in the full sense of the word, the reader may miss adequate treatment, or even the very names, of certain great Polish authors who are either alive still, or more of a living force than writers of a remote past. This deficiency is to be supplied by another volume on *Modern Polish Literature*, which is in preparation.

The present course of lectures being the first attempt at comprehensive treatment of the subject in English, free use has been made of the standard Polish works on the literary history of Poland, such as the voluminous books of Professors Chmielowski and Tarnowski, as well as the more succinct manuals of Professor Chrzanowski (on the Polish Literature before the partitions) and of Professor Brückner: it is chiefly to the two-volume *Outline of Polish Literary History* by the last-named great scholar that the author is deeply indebted for guidance in the selection of material.

The presentation of the material selected, being an endeavour to make this extremely unfamiliar subject palatable and interesting to the English reader, must justify itself. In this task the author has utilized some experience acquired during his temporary tenure of the Polish Readership in the School of Slavonic Studies at

King's College in the University of London, in 1922 and 1923. Two lectures delivered there, and not at Oxford, are embodied in the present volume as the second and the fifth.

Being a teacher of English Literature in his own country, the author has had the great model of W. J. Courthope's *History of English Poetry* before his eyes in trying to connect Polish Literature, at each stage of its historical course as here presented, with the political and social history of the nation. Not only was this necessary because Polish History may be assumed to be as little known to the reader of this book as Polish Literature, but also because literature in Poland, especially during those periods of the nineteenth century when the nation had hardly any other means of self-expression left, was a more essential function of national life than almost in any other country of modern Europe.

In conclusion, the author fulfils a pleasant duty in expressing his gratitude to the Curators of the Taylorian Institution at Oxford for the opportunity, afforded him by their invitation, both to speak on the literary history of his country to members of an old University which he loves and honours, and to put his lectures in print before the general public of a country whose literature and civilization he has made the devoted study of his life. For the benefit of a better understanding between nations, and of peace and progress, the writer may be allowed to express a hope that his present attempt to make the achievements of his nation known to England may meet with a modest proportion, at least, of the sympathy and interest which his labours in interpreting English Literature and traditions to his countrymen never fail to call forth in Poland.

R. DYBOSKI.

OXFORD,  
February 18, 1923.



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## FIRST LECTURE

### RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

IN Poland, as in England, the Renaissance is remembered as a true *Golden Age* both in the life of the State and in the history of literature. The sixteenth century saw Poland in the zenith of its political power in Europe, and it also produced Poland's very greatest poets and prose-writers before the even greater ones whom the tragedy of national calamity inspired in modern times.

In Poland, as elsewhere, literary greatness follows in the wake of expanding Empire. The Roman appellation of the *Augustan Age* seems, in fact, appropriate to the period of Poland's humanist classics, just because the reign of King Sigismund Augustus, when most of them flourished, is, like the era of the Emperor Augustus in Rome, a time of peaceful possession of wealth and might rather than of its conquering rise. Nay, it shows, again like the age of the Roman Augustus, the first symptoms of political decay side by side with fullest poetical expression of greatness achieved.

It was more than a century before that Poland had taken its rank among the greatest European Powers by its union with the large territories of Lithuania and its victory over the German Knights of the Cross, that vanguard of Teutonic expansion in Europe. With this dangerous aggressor at its feet, access to the Baltic secured, the Turks and Tartars kept in check, and the eastern neighbour in Moscow not

yet developed into a serious menace, Poland indeed flourished politically and economically. It was the centre of the grandest dynastic combinations, and a king of it for a time bore the triple crown of Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary together. But it was not only as the wielder of great international influence that Poland then occupied an important position on the map of Europe. Having made civic freedom a reality in the shape of a definite system of Parliamentary institutions in the middle of the fifteenth century, and having developed its old University of Cracow into a renowned seat of learning, Poland attracted its neighbours as a centre of lawful liberty and refined intellectual culture, and men and nations willingly gathered to it for protection and enlightenment. It seemed, in fact, that Poland was on its way towards assured and lasting leadership among the peoples of Eastern Europe, where the natural direction of its expansion lay.

## I

No wonder that the glories of such historical achievement found their heralds. JOHN DŁUGOSZ, the teacher of the royal princes of the time, became the father of Polish historiography by the imposing twelve books of his Latin *History of Poland*, written at the suggestion of Poland's leading statesman of the period, Zbigniew Oleśnicki. Another divine, a burgher by origin, MARTIN KROMER, spoke to Europe of *Polish Origins* and of *Polish Traditions, Institutions, and Customs* in two elegant Latin works. And a third one, JOHN OSTRORÓG, in a memorable Latin treatise on political theory upheld, in the true spirit of Italian Humanism, the self-conscious power of State and Nation against that greatest force in the mediaeval world—the Roman Church.

Latin works by eminent Poles long continued to witness to the Western world of Poland's greatness. LAURENCE GRIMALDUS GOSLICIUS' famous political treatise *De Optimo Senatore* was translated into English as late as the eighteenth century (by Oldisworth in 1733); and the Latin humanist poets of Poland, ANDREW CRICIUS, CLEMENS JANICIUS, MATTHEW SARBIEVIUS, were read in the classical schools of Western Europe even in modern times.

The excellences of Poland's numerous Latin writers were only rivalled by literary excellence in vernacular poetry and *belles-lettres* prose somewhat later in the day, in a period, as I said, of peaceful enjoyment rather than widening endeavour. Prolonged peace was bought at the usual price of political resignation. The outlet on Poland's second sea—the Black Sea—could not permanently be held against the Turks; Hungary and Bohemia were finally abandoned to the Habsburgs; a worldly Prussian principality was allowed to rise in the place of the Knights of the Cross, under the formal cloak of a vassal of Poland. And the increasing might of Moscow was encountered but desultorily and irresolutely in prolonged but inconclusive campaigns, of which the shore of the Baltic was the principal object. Even when a later and very great king, Stephen Bathory, led a conquering expedition on a grand scale against it, he was checked on the threshold of ultimate success by intrigues between Moscow and Rome, and Poland's regard to the wishes of Rome, on this as on other points, contributed to its ruin. A Polish invasion of Moscow itself, later on, became a mere historical episode, not altering the trend of events essentially. And by extending its foothold on the Baltic shore, Poland became additionally entangled in age-long, ruinous broils with the Scandinavian powers, which could not be otherwise than fruitless.

To such symptoms of arrested progress in Empire development there corresponded signs of *social decadence within*. Parliamentary Poland, which was to be a democratic republic of gentlemen citizens, became an oligarchy of the great nobles; even the greatest statesman of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, John Zamoyski, called by a historian the *Tribunus Populi* of Poland's gentry, proved incapable of turning the course of development. The limitations imposed on elected kings, instead of securing Constitutional Government by the will of the people, only deprived Poland of a strong central administrative authority, and of the possibility to create a powerful standing army. And this was most vitally needed in a country of wide and open frontiers. The chivalrous patriotism of a soldierly gentry supplied the deficiency at many a critical moment of Polish History as late as the seventeenth century. But even in the sixteenth this spirit was visibly degenerating. Legislation on distinctly agrarian lines of class interest made the gentry rich by the export of corn, and unwilling, in its prosperity, to undergo the privation of warfare when needed. And the reckless disregard of the interests of the middle class of the towns, its political disabilities and want of economic opportunity in such a system, was bound to revenge itself in the long run; so was the utter enslavement of peasant labour, which could not be a lasting basis for the welfare of the country. Finally, the added touch of Roman Catholic fanaticism, as introduced by the Jesuits, destroyed what the light of Humanism and the fresh breath of the Reformation had done to make Poland a living intellectual power.

But before the Counter-Reformation came to stay, the Reformation had accomplished its task of stimulating and popularizing the use of the vernacular tongue in writing and print, and a really great Polish Literature had arisen in the afternoon and sunset glories of Poland's Golden Age.



The very first representative figure of this literature, the man who, four hundred years ago, made Polish a real literary language by the large body of his gifted verse, belonged to the Reformed faith. The first eminent Polish poet, NICHOLAS REY, became a Calvinist in middle age.

1543, the year of the death of the great Polish astronomer COPERNICUS, and of the publication of his epoch-making work *On the Movements of the Heavenly Bodies*, is also a memorable date in the annals of Polish Literature. In this year both Polish poetry, in the person of Rey, and Polish prose, in the person of Orzechowski, first appear in the dignity of literary excellence. Before them the use of Polish in literature had been but a makeshift, a concession to the devotional needs of the uneducated and to the curiosity of women. After them Polish becomes the valued and perfect instrument of ambitious and gifted writers.

Rey is a type of the class which constituted the ruling body of Polish citizens. A jolly and jovial country gentleman, he is more addicted to convivial pleasures than to the study of books; fond of stories, ready with improvised song and verse at country christenings, weddings, and funerals, voluble in holding forth on disputed points at meetings and banquets of the district gentry, he transfers the genial flow of his eloquence, in all its racy idiom, to the products of an equally easy pen, which are soon read by the whole nation. His facility is as happy as his education is incomplete: fortunately for Polish literature he had never made much progress in the traditional Latin, and so he uses Polish as lustily with his pen as with his tongue, and as unceasingly too, and as sententiously. For Rey is nothing if not didactic in literature, as he was in life. His characteristic fondness for 'laying down the law' is displayed as drastic satire in his first published work, *A Short Debate between the Squire, the Parson, and the Village Bailiff*, and in his mocking

attacks on women in later verse dialogues. The same mentorial spirit is manifest in the long-winded and commonplace moralizing of Rey's bookish *Mystery Play on Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*.

The same teaching vein, again, made Rey an acknowledged religious classic, by his translation of the *Psalms*, by a commentary on the Book of *Revelation*, and, above all, by that most popular one of his religious books—the *Postilla*, or systematic exposition of Protestant Christian theology for laymen.

It was, finally, the same preoccupation with moral problems which raised Rey high beyond Sectarianism in his last, largest, and maturest three works: *The Image of the Honest Man*, *The Zodiac*, and *The Mirror*. All three are full of telling pictures of olden-time Polish life and custom, and of Rey's beloved (and sometimes obscene) jokes and anecdotes. *The Mirror*, in which Rey ultimately abstained from attacks on Catholicism, contains his testament as a moralist: *The Honest Man's Life*, which, in the form of a catechism of conduct, draws a full-size and thoroughly optimistic portrait of the Polish gentleman after Rey's own heart, devoted to his wife and children, to farming and country sports, and peaceably absorbed in his private affairs.

This idyllic image shows Rey's kindly nature at its very best, but it also shows its limitations. Constantly dwelling on a sound but narrow ideal of personal morality, he had shown little sense for social problems and civic duties. The noble recognition of his literary merits by the mild and enlightened humanist king, Sigismund I, in the form of a gift of land for his early translation of the *Psalms*, was deserved rather by a gifted and prolific writer who remains a true 'well of Polish undefiled', than by a great-hearted citizen.



And citizens of great heart became needed among writers as well as among men of action, since clouds of internal discord and lawlessness were beginning to obscure the serene sky of the Polish Empire. This was realized by the second eminent writer who had made his appearance in the field of Polish prose in the same year in which Rey had appeared before the public as a poet. STANISLAS ORZECZOWSKI, a proud and self-willed prelate of noble descent, himself a fierce and impulsive controversialist on religious and political matters, in the very thick of the fight is haunted by visions of ruin into which this domestic strife, produced by the exuberant individualism of the Polish gentry, will finally plunge the whole realm. 'If you cut my heart open, you will find nothing in it, but this one word only: We shall perish!' This exclamation is but one of the many extremities to which Orzechowski's passionate nature led him in his literary career. Beginning with revolt against Rome, and following Luther's example by marrying, he yet remained too much himself to obey the dictates of some foreign heretic of mean stock, and he became the most fervent defender of Catholicism in his later writings. His violence as a pamphleteer is only equalled by his excellence of style, and his Platonic Dialogues against both religious and political reform, although the outcome of short-sighted class prejudice and fanaticism, stand out head and shoulders over the vast mass of ephemeral writings in Polish with which the century of the Reformation fairly swarms. Similarly, Orzechowski's Latin memoirs of the four years' interregnum in Poland, from 1572 to 1576, are distinguished by their vividness and picturesqueness among our sources for the knowledge of the period.

The traditional Latin completely absorbs the literary activity of another and much more far-sighted political

writer of the time. ANDREW FRYCZ, called MODRZEWSKI, is justly famed as one of the luminaries of Polish political thought. Beginning with penetrating criticism of the injustice and inequality of Poland's social system, as exemplified by certain monstrous provisions of the Polish Criminal Code, Frycz extended his attention to the entire domain of State organization, and in his greatest work *De Emendanda Republica* outlined his ideal of a Poland reformed without revolution, governed by equal law for all the three estates of its citizens, and permeated in all the imagined details of its administration by a loftily moral and truly Christian conception of public service. Perhaps Frycz was right in choosing Latin for the exposition of such far-reaching ideas of political reform: his work attracted European attention, and was translated into many languages. But his teachings were too far in advance of the average political doctrines of the age to obtain authority in political practice, and least of all did he become a prophet in his own country. Here his noble dream of a synthesis between Catholicism and Protestantism set the militant Catholics against him, and a late posterity only has done him due homage.

While individual figures like Frycz, by his wisdom, or Orzechowski, by his talent, emerge in historical perspective from the muddy whirlpools of sectarian and political controversy, Polish literature, as a whole, fortunately does not become drowned in them either. It was not for nothing that the Reformation had quickened the impulse to write in Polish, and that Humanism had enlightened and broadened Polish minds. Vernacular authors, writing on themes above the controversy of a day, and in forms less perishable than the litter of sectarian pamphlets, now arise one after another. Rey is neither the first nor the only writer of Polish in his time. He is preceded in the

field of verse by a medical man of Lublin, BERNARD by name, who paraphrased *Aesop's Fables* in Polish rhymes, and also wrote the first medical treatise in Polish. Rey's own activity is surrounded, not only by a sea of pamphlets and larger books on debated issues in religion and in politics, not only by a flood of translations from the ancient classics, more ample in Poland than in many another European country in that humanist century, but also by a perfect ocean of cheap popular fiction, chiefly translated from German chap-books, and plentifully circulated by a busy printing-press, first set up at Cracow by a German, too—Hieronymus Viëtor of Vienna. And there is equal abundance of versifying—satirical, descriptive, didactic, journalistic—all of it as facile as Rey's, but for the most part much inferior in quality. Equal importance with Rey in the domain of poetry can, however, be claimed in that of prose by one who also preceded Rey's appearance. The worthy MARTIN WOLSKI, better known by his later name of BIELSKI, is indeed a typically mediaeval writer still, both in his huge Polish prose Chronicle of the World, in his dramatic allegory or moral play *The Life of a Brother and a Sister*, and in his *Satires*. But he is interesting to the modern reader, in that he usefully supplements the image which Rey's person and work present of the country gentleman, by vivid descriptions of life in the towns, and particularly at Cracow, then still the residence of the kings and full of bustling activities in trade, industry, and art.

Enlivened by the advent of many Italian scholars and artists in the wake of an Italian queen, Bona Sforza, the Royal Court of Cracow also produced, under direct Italian influence, a memorable monument of Polish prose and document of Polish culture, in a book called *The Polish Courtier*, and written by an ennobled burgher, LUCAS GÓRNICKI, who stood high in the favour of two great kings

of Poland in succession. He undertook to paraphrase and adapt to Polish conditions an Italian book of European reputation—Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. In doing so he presents, with a grace of diction and composition unattained before him, that ideal of intellectual refinement, lofty principle, gentlemanly honour, chivalrous physical culture, and perfect social tact, which the best men of that brilliant Polish Court endeavoured to realize in their lives and actions. Like Rey, but in a more sublime and truly humanist sense, he sees in individual perfection of personality the proper sum and the due aim of human efforts; and unlike that simple-minded rustic squire, and a true Humanist again in this, he sees a means toward such perfection not in high morality and good manners only, but in knowledge as well: 'for out of foolishness all unrighteousnesses grow.' Unlike Rey also, Górnicki steps beyond the individual sphere in his admonitions. A voluminous writer on manifold subjects, and more faithful to Polish than any literary man of his age, he is troubled in mind, like the rest of them, at the sight of Poland's growing internal evils. And although he is too much under the spell of things Italian, and particularly of the great Venetian Republic, to offer counsels really fit for Polish conditions, yet his honest sincerity is indubitable throughout. The sight of prolonged Civil War over a disputed election after the death of his second royal protector tears from his breast an exclamation of foreboding as desperate as the impassioned Orzechowski's. In an *Imaginary Conversation between an Italian and a Pole* he makes the critical foreigner say: 'Apparently neither you nor I shall live to see the Poles bethinking themselves of good counsel. God's judgements are driving you, as winds on the high seas drive a ship, and who knows whether into port or towards ruin? Which, if it comes, yourself will be guilty of. Well do

those ancient sages say : Principalities, Kingdoms, Monarchies are not spoiled by the enemy, but each will spoil itself, when a time of corruption comes.'

## II

The Court, the Country, and the Town—we have seen them worthily represented by Górnicki, Rey, and Bielski respectively. But all these three elements of sixteenth-century Polish civilization harmoniously unite in the life, the person, and the work of the greatest poet of Poland's Golden Age—JOHN KOCHANOWSKI—and, in addition to these, the best foreign culture to be got in the South and West of Europe, entered into his mind and art as a formative factor : he is the first great Humanist who is equally excellent in Latin and in Polish verse.

Born as a country gentleman's son, he passed on, as most of the Polish youth of his time did, from the Polish University of Cracow, which had by that time lost some of its earlier lustre, to the celebrated Italian University of Padua, and became a zealous student of the Ancients and an elegant writer of Latin verse while there. But even before, at Cracow, the religious movements of the time had inspired him to write devotional songs in Polish. Now he became familiar with the great vernacular poets of the Italian Renaissance, Petrarca, Ariosto, Tasso, who set him an example of poetry in the native tongue. Another such example, together with definite schooling in poetical forms, was supplied in Paris by Ronsard, whom Kochanowski knew personally. And it was from Paris that the melodious notes of a *Hymn of Thanksgiving to God* flowed over the Polish fields—a worthy voice of the still powerful and opulent country, which indeed had many blessings to thank



God for. This great early lyric of Kochanowski's, full of a wondrous new music, and magnificently rich in images of Nature at all seasons of the year, was joyfully welcomed throughout Poland as the lark's song of a new day in Polish poetry; old Rey himself did generous homage to his greater successor. Kochanowski, returning home, soon won universal recognition as the Prince of Polish Poets, which he is called to this day. His manhood was passed partly among the splendours of the Royal Court at Cracow, where he was secretary to the King, but for the most part in the retirement of his dearly loved country estate of 'Black Wood' (*Czarny Las*), of which he again and again sings the beauties. The poetic harvest of his life, though he died suddenly before reaching old age, is extremely rich and manifold. It begins with such a typical piece of classicist didacticism as the lively and entertaining paraphrase of the humanist Marco Vida's poem on the *Game of Chess*. It is continued by the youthful courtier, who has not yet forgotten his Italian student days, in his *Fraszki*, or 'Trifles', being satirical epigrams on human follies and merry jests in verse, to grace convivial hours. But although these *Trifles* are strewn, like random flowers, even on his later road of life, more serious and nobler tones becomingly begin to predominate in the verse of the mature man when, in the shadow of the favourite lime-tree in front of his country-house, he thoughtfully contemplates the quiet charm and rich uses of rural nature, or when grave national affairs stir him to a rousing call of warning. Such a cry he first raised when, echoing in verse a powerful parliamentary speech by the enlightened Vice-Chancellor of the Realm, Peter Myszkowski, he blames the Polish gentry, in his poem *The Satyr*, for having neglected its old chivalrous virtues in pursuit of wealth and luxury, and he laments both the growing religious dissensions, the decay of learning

in the old University, and the increasing mania of blindly admiring and imitating everything foreign—a permanent feature in the character of Poles and other Slavs. To counteract this tendency, Kochanowski lights up many a page of his poetry with the glories of Poland's heroic past, as when he sings of King Ladislas the Third, who fell fighting the Turks at Varna on the Black Sea, and proudly says that 'Europe is his grave, and the snowy Balkan mountains his tombstone, and the lasting memory of all Christians the inscription on it'.

The patriotic concern of Kochanowski over symptoms of corruption in the Polish body politic found its highest expression in a poetic drama, *The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys*, written to grace the wedding of Poland's greatest man of the time, Chancellor John Zamoyski. An episode from the old Homeric tale of Troy supplies the framework for thunderous admonitions and weighty words of political wisdom, addressed to the poet's own nation. It is Ulysses who, as in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, utters the wisest sayings on social order. And it is Polish bribery, sloth, and luxury which is aimed at under the allegory of corruption among the youth of Ilium, backing lecherous Paris in his refusal of the just demands of the Greeks, and in a ruinous war. The ravings of Cassandra, foretelling the fall of Troy, resound with the prophetic horror of a vision of Judgement Day for Poland.

In accordance with its subject, the play is cast in noble classic mould: it is classical in the uniform perfection of its majestic blank verse, the loftiness of its diction, and the austere simplicity of its structure, using word and not action as the mainspring of dramatic effect. This, indeed, was essentially in harmony, too, with Kochanowski's individual genius, which was lyrical above all. For at the same time with this one step of his into the dramatic sphere of old

Hellenic story and stage, Kochanowski was moving, and moving for ten years of his life, in the lyrical sphere of old Hebrew religious song and meditation. His versified version of the *Psalms* in manifold metres is one of his most popular works even unto this day: every Polish Catholic knows some of his Psalms by heart. They were the most perfect literary fruit borne in Poland by the religious movement of the Reformation age. Suggested by the great Scottish humanist George Buchanan's Latin poetical version, and composed leisurely and casually, they far surpass the numerous earlier Polish translations, including Rey's, by the variety and melody of their rhythms, and the riches and depth of their thought, which raise Kochanowski far above the theological controversies of the time and, indeed, place him highest among Poland's religious poets.

If the outward panorama of political life inspired Kochanowski's poetic play, and the outer turmoil of ecclesiastical strife stimulated the religious ardour of the *Psalms*, it was deep inward personal grief which inspired his third great work, the *Threni*, or *Complaints*. A dearly loved daughter, Ursula, the genial spirit of Kochanowski's home, gifted with a promising talent for music and verse, was torn by early death from the arms of a despairing father. In the series of Elegies to which this tragic loss gave birth, the poet runs through the whole gamut of feelings of mourning and thoughts on bereavement: from sad and tender recollection of grace, goodness, and joyousness vanished for ever, to the dark despondence of ironical contempt for the bootless consolations of philosophy, nay of doubt as to the immortality of the soul and the value of virtue—and through this 'Valley of the Shadow of Death' onward to quiet resignation under the healing hand of Time, to the relief of tears, and to regained faith in God and in the untroubled happiness of the beloved being in



a Realm beyond. The comparison with Tennyson's *In Memoriam* suggests itself.

The Elegies are certainly the work nearer to Kochanowski's own human heart than anything he ever wrote, and Poland's great painter John Matejko fitly chose this tragic event of the poet's life to immortalize him in his canvas, representing Kochanowski over the dead body of his daughter.

But the three large works which have been mentioned do not by far exhaust the range of Kochanowski's inspiration. He indeed walks down the path of life singing, and the wealth of his minor lyrical poems rings all the changes of tone and feeling, from lark-like warbles of sheer religious ecstasy, and trumpet sounds of patriotic fervour, to the organ voice of lofty moral strains, and the shepherd pipe of idyllic delight in country nature and country life. Like Rey, Kochanowski is a country gentleman, heart and soul. He is never tired of admiring the returning wonders of the seasons, of praising the farmer's occupations and sports, his domestic pleasures and simple social amusements. Kochanowski's garland of Bucolics called *A Summer Song of St. John's Eve* is a gallery of pictures of quaint old country custom as well as a rich symphony of lyric moods. And, in a famous passage on the quiet happiness of the Polish village after the day's toil, it contains a worthy Polish analogue to the 'Cotter's Saturday Night' of Burns.

No wonder that a poet whose voice thus had in it the very soul of his country was surrounded by a chorus of praise from his contemporaries, and elevated in their estimation high above the other Polish writers of his time. But, like Shakespeare, he does not stand alone: besides a numerous attendance of insignificant imitators and followers, he has worthy satellites of lesser, but still considerable, gifts and glory.

One of them, NICHOLAS SEP SZARZYŃSKI, was, in fact,

prevented by an early death only from soaring beyond Kochanowski even, as the graceful, melancholy singer of a more passionate, unhappy love, of more profound and philosophical religious experience, of more earnest culture of beauty in poetical expression. His *Sonnets*, which have but recently won due appreciation, show us a figure not unlike the English John Donne, both in the strange melody of the verse and the stranger union of sensuous ardour with metaphysical brooding. And the range of Szarzyński's poetry was widening into manful praise of national heroism, and mature expression of sterling civic sentiment, when his brilliant career was cut short.

And as Bielski by his pictures of town life supplemented the poetry of Rey, the country gentleman, so the poetry of the country gentleman Kochanowski is supplemented by the voluminous and realistic if pedestrian verse of a townsman, SEBASTIAN KLONOWIC, who in long descriptive poems, both Polish and Latin, gives us an account of the real day-to-day life in sixteenth-century Poland, with its animated trade, its varied business uses and abuses, its customs at work and play, the earnest activities of its burghers, and the cruel wrongs suffered by its peasants. In *Roxolania* he describes the rich results of Polish colonizing and civilizing effort on the wide and fruitful expanse of the territory which is known as Eastern Galicia to-day; in *The Bargeman* we get vivid pictures of life on the river Vistula, the principal channel of Poland's corn trade; in *Jude's Satchel* interesting examples are given of the practices of highwaymen, thieves, and dishonest tradesmen, with which Klonowic had occasion to become acquainted as mayor and municipal judge in the town of Lublin. Everywhere the confident sense of social dignity in the burgher is apparent: in his didactic poem *Victoria Deorum* Klonowic emphatically opposes it to the gentry's growing corruption and its unjust contempt of the

honest occupations of townsmen. The voice of Klonowic, proclaiming that 'true nobility is rooted in desert', was a voice in the wilderness, however. Half a hundred years after his death Poland disgraced herself by a law forbidding noblemen to engage in trade or industry. And the burghers were debarred from ownership of land and from parliamentary representation, and subject to troublesome administrative control over their trade.

Thus Klonowic, the townsman, also was among the prophets who were not heard.

### III

We have caught voices of terrible warning on our way in the work of Rey and of Orzechowski, of Górnicki and of Kochanowski, in fact of all the leading writers of the age. But they were all surpassed in dramatic power and fearful distinctness of vision by Poland's greatest preacher, the Jesuit priest PETER SKARGA.

In the person and work of Skarga, the stimulus given by the Reformation to national literature and life brings forth splendid fruit on the very soil of zealous Roman Catholicism. Among the prolific literature of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Poland Skarga's name stands out side by side with that of JACOB WUJEK, who in his Roman Catholic Polish translation of the Bible in 1599 gave Poland its 'Authorised Version' of the Holy Scriptures, in which they are read and quoted unto this day. And Skarga's *Lives of the Saints* enjoy equal popularity even now among the devout, as a companion book and a standard religious classic.

But however the strength and purity of the excellent Polish language of this and of other devotional works by Skarga may be admired even to-day, it is by his *Sermons* chiefly that he rises, as a writer and as a citizen, to heights

unequalled by anybody in Poland's Golden Age. He may not appeal to us to-day as a militant priest: the restless activities of a working member of the Society of Jesus associate him with all the great towns of Poland by turns, from Dorpat, Riga, and Wilno in the north to Lwów in the east, Cracow in the south, and the new capital of Warsaw in the centre: everywhere he strenuously fights Protestant heresy with all weapons, fair or foul, not shrinking from political intrigue. This, although combined with devoted work in the field of public instruction and of charity organization, may have as little claim on modern admiration as Skarga's well-meant effort to promote the conversion of all the Russian peoples to Roman Catholicism by his book *On the Unity of God's Church*. But when we come to Skarga's twenty-three years' work as preacher to the Royal Court, and particularly to the eight outstanding and memorable political *Sermons* preached in this capacity before King and Parliament in 1597, all criticism is hushed before the awe-inspiring figure of the greatest national prophet of independent Poland. These sermons are not the crown of Skarga's work only: they are the crown of Polish political literature.

Skarga makes it his task, in them, to search the body politic of Poland for all its moral diseases, and he deals with them by turn in the spirit of a warm-hearted physician desirous and hopeful of cure, but not hesitating to foretell death, if remedies are not adopted. First among the diseases stands ill-will toward the Commonwealth in the greed for private gain; second, domestic discord; third, sectarian dissensions; fourth, the weakening of State authority; fifth, unjust laws; and sixth, the impunity of manifest offences. All the social evils of Poland come under one or other of these headings. The real subjection of the mass of the gentry to a few selfish magnates lies as

open to Skarga's eye, and is as boldly laid bare to his hearers, in its disastrous hideousness, as the cruel oppression of the poor peasant by his owner, which is condemned by Skarga with the same deep human pity for the victim that the enlightened Frycz had shown before him. The 'infernal' undisciplined licence of the much-famed 'golden Polish liberty' of the gentry is as strongly stigmatized as the ruinous weakness of the Central Government and of its head, the Crown, in such a doomed system. No clearer indictment has ever been drawn up, indeed, of the causes that led, from within, to Poland's fall. Two hundred years later, the faults exposed by Skarga were terribly visited upon the descendants of his hearers. Being defects rooted in national character, they are worth remembering at all times, and Skarga's teachings are as much alive in the reborn Poland of to-day as they were in the decaying Poland of his time. It was with his usual right instinct for things vital in the history of the nation that Poland's great painter Matejko has made the inspired figure of Skarga in his pulpit, and his brilliant, awe-struck congregation, live for ever in one of his great canvases.

As said before, the terrible clearness of Skarga's prophetic vision is equalled by the terrible might of his prophetic word. In the eight great sermons he rises to supreme thunders from soft and tender notes. To the diseases shown up he opposes the virtues needed to cure them, and speaking of love of country as one of them, in his second sermon, he finds accents and arguments for attachment to the common Mother which are re-echoed by every Polish heart now and for ever. 'From her you have your name and all that you have . . . ' 'This beloved mother has given you the freedom which other nations have not . . . ' 'Loving her, you love yourself . . . ' 'This dear ship of our State carries us all, we have in it all we have, and if we look to our personal



belongings, and not to the safety of the ship, we shall all go down with it.'

From such admonitions to natural feeling and common sense, he passes on to piercing cries of alarm and heart-shaking threats of ruin. Exhorting the quarrelling politicians to saving unity and concord, he conjures up a hell of horrors of captivity under hostile neighbours, who will profit by national dissensions. And we see in his very words the real Poland of the coming nineteenth century: a nation of beggars, outlaws, and exiles, despised by those who once respected and feared them, forsaken by those who followed them and clung to them, deprived of house and home, of law and language, of name and fame.

And again, in dreadful presentiment that the warning will not be taken, Skarga, in the last sermon of all, borrows figurative power from the prophets of Israel, and becomes Isaiah, who, half naked and bare, showed his people the nakedness of slavery; and he becomes Jeremiah, who, with chains on his feet and neck, showed them the constraint of captivity; and he becomes Ezekiel, who, scattering his shorn hair to the winds, showed them the helpless dispersion of exile. He sees them buried under the fallen walls of their own house, shattered like an empty flask, defenceless in a breached fortress. He who called himself 'a deputy, indeed, but not from one electoral district', here proclaims himself the messenger of a just and punishing God.

'Fear ye still these threats!' Skarga cried; but towards the close of a long life he felt that he cried in vain. 'Alack,' so the old man laments in a preface in the words of the prophet Micah, 'I have fallen upon an evil time: autumn is come, the sweet fruits from the garden of this land are gone: the wise and honest and righteous and powerful men, the lovers of virtue and of their country, are no more.'

Gone, indeed, was the age of Poland's great men, and civic

spirit was decaying. Skarga's words stirred up no spark of nobleness in the breasts of a selfish and short-sighted gentry. Poland once more, by a valiant national effort, shook herself free from overwhelming enemy invasions in the century which followed, but the work of inward corruption could not be arrested, and a weakening Poland at last fell a prey to the greed of aggressive neighbours, whose coming Skarga had foreseen. It was only on the eve of the inevitable catastrophe, in the eighteenth century, that a brilliant band of enlightened writers and strenuous political reformers redeemed the old Polish Commonwealth from the reproach of going down in all the rottenness of unreformed abuses. The creators of the Constitution of the Third of May, 1791, are the direct inheritors of the great Skarga tradition.

## SECOND LECTURE

### POLISH LITERATURE IN A CENTURY OF WARS

#### I

THE seventeenth century is a period which a Pole is apt to consider 'with one auspicious and one dropping eye'. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly a truly *heroic age* of independent Poland: the lustre shed round its war-like exploits in modern Polish literature by the trilogy of Sienkiewicz's historical novels—the most popular of his works in his own country—is well deserved: invaded by Swedes and Turks, Tartars and Cossacks, Russians and Transylvanians, the country by mighty efforts shook itself free of them all; the gentry, for a last time, proved itself worthy of its great inheritance and its social privileges, and when Poland's chivalry, under King John Sobieski in 1683, came to the rescue of besieged Vienna and saved Christian Europe from the Turk, it might well have seemed that Poland was resuming its position as a dominating power and a bulwark of Western civilization in the East of Europe.

But the same century was the critical period of *beginning decay* for Poland's political and social system. The free election of kings after the extinction of the glorious Jagellonian dynasty became a source of intrigues and bribery, lawlessness and civil wars; and the succession



of three kings from the Swedish dynasty of Vasa implicated Poland in prolonged and ruinous wars with Sweden, which brought no permanent gains and, by ravaging Poland, only strengthened the growing power of its eastern neighbour—Russia. A hundred years after a Polish garrison had held the Kremlin of Moscow, Peter the Great could already hatch the first definite plans of putting an end to Polish independence. King Sobieski represented in his person some of the noblest features of the Polish gentleman, but, through a French wife, was as much subject to the hegemony of the France of Louis XIV as were other and lesser European rulers of the time.

Such disastrous developments as to Poland's international position were coupled with marked *decadence of constitutional order*, legal authority, and administrative efficiency within the State. Polish Parliamentarism stagnated, incapable of progressive evolution and liberal reform; the large mass of gentlemen voters, glorying in the 'golden liberty' of their political rights, blindly became a willing tool for the personal ambitions of great nobles. The limitations of the Monarchy were enforced by armed rebellions against kings, and the impunity of the rebels encouraged further licence. Insistence on a fantastic principle of unanimity in all political assemblies barred the way to all effective legislation; class selfishness of prosperous corn-traders denied the means to organize a standing army and to establish the finance of the State on a sound basis of taxation. The same agrarian egoism cramped and finally destroyed the commercial prosperity of the towns, and prevented the growth of a strong and satisfied middle class. Finally, the administration of justice became both tainted by corruption, and powerless in view of free and open disregard of its decrees.

## II

In the field of *culture*, seventeenth-century Poland presents as mixed a spectacle as in the field of politics and social development. Again, as in the case of Poland's political position, the outward aspect is still imposing. The intellectual, literary, and artistic glories of the century of Renaissance and Reformation retain some of their splendour in the century of Baroque and of Counter-Reformation; the influence of Polish civilization still has force enough to expand into some neighbouring countries; the most distinguished Roumanian author of the age sings the history of his country in a Polish epic; Polish prose and verse is plentifully written, printed, and read in the Ukrainian country round Kiev (then Poland's south-eastern border province); the theological wars between Orthodox Eastern Christians and partisans of the Union with Rome are waged in Polish pamphlets in those regions, until the great Cossack Revolt of 1647 changes the country into an actual battle-field. Even the Russian literature of Moscow is full of translations from Polish after the period of the two Polish expeditions into the heart of Russia, in 1612 and 1633. On the western side, Silesia, separated from Poland since the middle of the fourteenth century, gets force enough from neighbourly contact with the pulsating literary life of the mother country to develop a racy Polish literature of its own in the moral and satirical writings of its Protestant clergymen, and Breslau long remains a great centre of Polish publishing activity.

In Poland itself, literature imbibes new influences both from Italy and France, and actual book-production is, if possible, even more abundant than at the very height of the magnificent outburst of poetry and prose writing in

the sixteenth century. Convulsed as the country continually is by wars, it can by no means be said of the period that the Muses in it are silenced by the clang of arms—*inter arma silent Musae*.

However, there are grave shadows in the picture. Catholicism, ultimately triumphant over the reformed doctrines, brought *religious intolerance* in its train: persecution of that highly cultured and intellectually productive community, the sect of the Arians, and anti-Protestant riots in many of the larger towns. What was of more far-reaching consequence, the Jesuits, that vanguard of militant Catholicism, took the whole fabric of national education into their hands, to retain it for nearly three centuries, and soon very effectively narrowed down the liberal culture of Poland to mechanical mastery of spoken Latin—which affected the native tongue adversely—and hardly less mechanical perfection in the formalism of orthodox religious doctrine.

The suppression and expulsion of Arians is a great loss in brilliant intellectual and literary possibilities; as one instance only of their manifold and meritorious work it may be singled out that one of them—SAMUEL OTWINOWSKI—introduced a masterpiece of Persian literature, Sadi's *Gulistan* or 'Rose-Garden', to the Polish reader in a translation equally choice in diction and form. Driven out of Poland, Polish Arians adorned the civilization of countries which gave them shelter: one of them, LUBIENIECKI, was, for a time, professor in the Academy of Arts in Berlin under the Great Elector; others kept the Dutch printing press busy with their Latin works.

Polish Catholics, on the contrary, under the Jesuit system of education, began to lose touch with foreign centres of culture: Italian and French universities numerous frequented by Polish students in the Rena-

science period, were less and less attended by them; and at home learning decayed, and ecclesiastical pressure was heavy even on Catholic literature: even one of the great parliamentary sermons of that Jesuit classic of the former age, Skarga, did not escape the Jesuit censorship now. Some of the most distinguished Polish writers of the seventeenth century prefer to keep certain important works of theirs in *manuscript*, to be discovered only in our days. Among what the new teachers of the nation themselves produce, there is much indeed at first that has a just claim to renown: SARBIEWSKI, a Polish Jesuit, is one of the foremost Latin poets of the modern world and worthily bears the name of 'the Christian Horace'. But Polish literature in the native tongue fares less well at a time when Corneille and Racine, Milton and Dryden, Calderon and Molière illumine the literary annals of the Western European nations. The stimulus given to vernacular literature by the Reformation movement was weakening everywhere, as the principle was gaining ground in Europe that 'he who rules the State, rules the Faith' (*cuius regio, illius religio*). Elsewhere, however, new sources of inspiration welled up—revived mysticism in Spain, a splendid Court life in France, epoch-making political changes in England. In Poland, as in Italy, loss of political significance is marked by literary exhaustion. And, as in Italy, baroque in literature is more pronounced than elsewhere, this being the characteristic style of a generation who draw for inspiration rather on the overworked traditions of the age before them than on any vital elements in the life around them.

## III

However, one element there was which could give power and fire to literature, and that was the ordeal of warfare, through which the nation passed again and again in that stormy century. We see the moral effect of those heroic struggles for Poland's existence when we compare the great sixteenth-century Parliamentary sermons of Skarga with those of his successor in the Polish pulpit, the Dominican priest BIRKOWSKI, who preached not in the Court, but in the Camp, and not to statesmen and politicians, but to generals and soldiers. His eloquence, less reasoned in argument and perfect in phrase than Skarga's, is more passionate and straightforward: he exalts plain soldierly virtues and blames common soldierly faults; as with a trumpet-call, he attempts to stir up in his hearers the spirit of crusaders; rousing them to fight the infidel Turk, he glories in the historical mission of Poland as an outpost of Christian civilization. Not always tragic, terrible, loftily serious as Skarga, he does not disdain to descend, in the fashion of mediaeval preachers, to the level of his simple soldierly audience, and captivate their childlike interest by anecdote and story, curious detail and quaint symbolism, to familiarize sacred subjects by realistic metaphor and simile from the sphere of daily surroundings and occupations. This journalism in the pulpit, from appropriate manner in Birkowski, became extravagant mannerism in many of his successors: he is the intermediate link between their oddities and the Biblical grandeur of the classic Skarga.

The prophetic patriotism of Skarga's sermons revives, in a different sphere from pulpit eloquence, in the political, moral, and religious writings of one of Poland's most learned men in the seventeenth century, the Canon of Cracow



Cathedral, SIMON STAROWOLSKI. Learning, both wide and deep, unites in his venerable person with gravity and integrity of character, and one and the other are unswervingly employed in the service of his country, the cause of which is always nearest to his heart, and never clouded by unpatriotic doubt: the whole of his noble soul went into the reply to the invading Swedish king who, when visiting the tombs of Poland's monarchs, expressed his conviction that the Polish king, whom he had expelled from his country, would never come back to rest here: 'Fortune may vary, but God does not change,' said Starowolski: *Fortuna variabilis, Deus immutabilis*. His literary activities are pervaded by the same earnest spirit of confidence; in his books, both Polish and Latin, he always is the guardian of Poland's dignity, the herald of its greatness, and a firm believer in its future. In Latin writings he made foreigners acquainted with the geography and the political institutions of Poland as well as with her leading men; he also defended his country against attacks by German scholars; he composed a treatise on the methods and uses of history, and the first repertory of Polish writers. When addressing his own countrymen in his native tongue, he is above all a moralist; he shows up, with all the seriousness of Skarga, and much of his power, the vices and errors of the nation, in a long series of tracts; he endeavours to rouse public attention to such vital questions of Polish foreign policy as the problem of the Turks and Tartars in Europe, to which he recurs again and again, having himself visited the Turkish Sultan's Court in the course of his early wanderings. And he is not a satirical critic or academic theorizer only: he offers definite proposals to meet the Turkish danger—by fortification of the frontiers, by colonization of border districts, and even by a league of European nations—he has projects of social and political reform, and is very outspoken,

in an age of warfare, on the lawless licence of the soldiery and the duties of a Christian warrior. In exposing the benighted ignorance and short-sighted class selfishness of the gentry, he shows a vivid grasp of social realities, rare in a man of academic learning, and in giving voice to the 'laments of the afflicted mother', Poland, against her unworthy sons in the darkest periods of foreign invasion, and imploring God's mercy, he rises to the heights of the prophetic exaltation of Skarga, though his temperamental optimism shrinks from visions of ultimate destruction, and ends on an accent of hope.

The satirical vein, so strikingly noticeable on occasion in a grave scholar like Starowolski, is naturally much more marked, and in fact dominant, in the moralizing verse of the proud and supercilious magnate CHRISTOPHER OPALIŃSKI, who unfortunately acted against his own counsels of perfection by betraying his country and surrendering Western Poland to the Swedes, when they landed on Polish ground. His mediocre but voluble verse *Satires* are historically valuable by the detailed account they give of Poland's social evils, in following the typical career of a Polish nobleman through all its phases: we behold, as in a panorama, domestic miseducation and mismanagement of public schools, illiteracy among the clergy and immorality among laymen; drunkenness and riotous living; heartlessness to the poor and want of true religion under the cloak of bigotry; civil disobedience to authority and open disrespect for the law; weakness of the government, lack of discipline in the army, undefended frontiers; corruptible judges and bribed officials; an empty treasury and decaying commerce in the towns; even the ruthless exploitation and oppression of the peasants is stigmatized by one who was himself a great landlord. The powerful noble is not afraid, either of the Jesuits, whom he blames for infesting the

whole world with fanaticism, or of the highest officers in the State, on whose personal responsibility he insists, or even of the King, whom he censures for distributing honours among unworthy men, and allowing himself to be surrounded and advised by knaves or fools.

Satirical verse was also written by OPALIŃSKI's brother LUCAS, one of the most enlightened men of his age in Poland, and as chivalrously faithful to his country as Christopher was treacherous. His *Satires* are more literary and less forceful: one of them takes the form of a verse treatise on the art of poetry in the fashion of Boileau, and they dwell chiefly on lesser evils, cautiously sparing the higher nobility and the powerful clergy, and throwing contempt rather on the rank and file of the lower people for their darkness and meanness. If less comprehensive in social scope and less bold in denunciation, the criticism of these satires, however, has the merit of being supplemented by constructive advice, as in the pages of Starowolski. Opaliński laid down such as he could offer, in his anonymous prose *Discourse between the Parson and the Squire*, which is recognized as far and away the wisest political tract of the period. It emphasizes the one thing needful—strengthening of central government authority—and contains many a penetrating criticism of the fruitless debating methods of the Polish Parliament, in which the author himself, for a time, occupied the Speaker's chair.

But the Polish gentry of the seventeenth century preferred to listen to its most typical didactic classic ANDREW MAXIMILIAN FREDRO. His *Proverbs*, perfect in diction and rich in human wisdom, err most gravely by blind patriotic optimism and lawless class spirit. The faulty Polish constitution is to him a *palladium* of noblest civic liberty, and he even defended some of its worst practices in Latin writings against the outer world. So did others, whom the slightest critical



remarks on Polish abuses by enlightened foreigners—like the Scottish humanist Alexander Barclay—goaded into writing volumes of passionate protest, and fanciful apology of the indefensible, even after the calamity of a Swedish invasion helped by domestic treason.

Such shallow optimists got a more willing hearing than the graver moralists and satirists who dwelt warningly on manifest evils.

#### IV

Some ground for optimism there appeared to be, after all, in the truly heroic and successful effort by which the nation once more got rid of a flood of foreign invasion. And if the moralists and satirists are justified in denouncing social ills at such a serious and critical time, the three important *epic poets* of the period have no less reason to be inspired by the chivalrous glories of the age for large works of Homeric, or at least Virgilian, ambition. More immediate models for epic effort on a grand scale, than either Homer or Virgil, had by this time appeared in all their lustre before Polish readers and writers. The great Italian Renaissance epics, Ariosto's *Orlando* and Tasso's *Jerusalem*, took worthy Polish shape, in all the beauty of the flowing *ottava rima*, in the translations by PETER KOCHANOWSKI, whom the inheritance of a great name from his uncle, the greatest poet of the Polish Renaissance, and even the inheritance of the same high office of Secretary to the King, made nobly ambitious. His *Orlando* was circulated only in manuscript ; it came more laboriously from the translator, and its fantastic humour carried less appeal to the robust realism of the Polish country gentlemen, who were the principal class of readers. But the first-fruits of Kochanowski's inspiration, the Tasso, with all the lofty chivalry and devout gravity of

the original, struck a consonant chord in the hearts of a generation ceaselessly engaged in mighty battles for the greatest causes, and both the melodious perfection of form, and the noble treatment of a high subject—all worthily rendered by the translator—challenged emulation in Polish. Kochanowski himself sang powerful contemporary events, which shook the Polish scene, in verse of lesser merit than that of his translations; as historiographer-royal he even attempted an epic on Sobieski's rescue of Vienna, but left it unfinished.

It was for others to stand up boldly as rivals to Tasso in Polish original compositions on the great events of the time. Earliest among them stands SAMUEL TWARDOWSKI, a gentleman whom adventurous fortunes carried from one end of Poland to another and made an active partaker in most of the foreign wars and domestic broils of the age. Like Kochanowski, he is consciously inspired by the model of Kochanowski's great namesake, the Renaissance poet: in his fashion he laments the death of a beloved daughter in elegies; he attacks the civic degeneracy of his own class in a poem of invective, represented, as in the case of Kochanowski, as the speech of a mythological *Satyr* in the wood to a solitary wanderer. Like the other Kochanowski, he looks to southern countries of Romance for themes and forms: in the newly-introduced *ottave rime*, and in the classic manner of the Theocritean idyl, he paraphrases an opera, produced at Court, on the Ovidian subject *Daphne changed into the Laurel-tree*; and in verse likewise he reproduces, with a moralizing turn, the story of the beautiful *Pasqualina* from that Spanish novel, *Diana*, by Montemayor, which was so vastly popular in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. It is not on foreign originals, however, but on the chequered experience of his own life that Twardowski draws in his more extended and preten-

tious epic poems. In the first of them, he describes, with much picturesque detail, a diplomatic mission to Constantinople in which he himself took part; in the second, he revels in the splendour of Court ceremonies in singing the exaggerated praises of his Royal protector King Ladislas IV of the Vasa dynasty, who certainly was a wise and patriotic monarch, but actually accomplished little either abroad or at home, owing to the indolence and opposition of the gentry. Finally, in the third and hugest epic work—a monster of 16,000 lines—the author takes for his province the whole of the fourteen stormy years of continuous warfare against Cossacks and Tartars, Russians and Swedes and Transylvanians, which he himself had lived through. His ornate if picturesque diction, rich in absurd mythological images and unnatural Latinisms, shows the barock style in Polish literature fully developed, and his honest and sterling patriotic sentiments are occasionally marred (as in the case of many another writer of the age) by errors of judgement, as when he welcomed the Swedes, hoping they would restore order to Poland.

In civic spirit, as well as by the magnitude of his achievement and its literary value, Twardowski is surpassed by the other epic singer of the heroic exploits of the age—WACŁAW POTOCKI, one of Poland's noblest citizens in the century, and a true ornament of that unjustly persecuted sect, the Arians. At the very beginning of the era of wars, the old warrior spirit of Poland had shown itself perhaps at its best when, in 1621, half a hundred thousand Poles and Ukrainian Cossacks, under the Polish General Chodkiewicz, in the fortified camp of Chocim on the south-eastern border of Poland, stubbornly resisted, for a month, a gigantic Turkish army of three hundred thousand, sent out by the Sultan to conquer the whole of Poland. Half a century later, when another Turkish tide was about to be stemmed by the whole

force of Poland, under Sobieski, in the same region, the poet fired the hearts of his countrymen for new resistance by an elaborate verse chronicle of the old Chocim campaign. Full of realistic (though partly imaginary) detail, the work, in its matter-of-fact tone, is modelled on Lucan's *Pharsalia* rather than on Virgil or Tasso. But it is constantly lifted above the level of prosaic report of monotonous trench warfare by the author's ardent love of his country and its glorious traditions, by his whole-hearted endeavours to revive old virtues in the hearts of later generations, by his noble appeals to the true gentleman's sense of duty and responsibility, and, last not least, by a style, though burdened with metaphor and simile in the florid fashion of the age, yet full of a racy vigour and a natural ease of movement unparalleled in the period.

Potocki was not only the most distinguished, but also the most productive poet of the time: his voluminous works, running all in all into some 300,000 lines, remained mostly unprinted in his lifetime, and some of them have only won due recognition in our days. After celebrating the old Chocim campaign, he attempted, in his later years an epic account of the new one under Sobieski which ended in more decided victory. But this new epic was left unfinished; so was a paraphrase of the Gospel story in verse on an enormous scale under the stirring title *The New Enlistment*, and full indeed of militant missionary zeal and of the religious fervour of a mystic. The same vein prevails in a dramatic mystery on the Resurrection of our Lord.

And this is far from being the end. Besides a most elaborate *compendium* of heraldry—the only book he ever published, full of the quaintest allegorical fancies, but of telling anecdotes as well—Potocki further composed a series of verse romances on such widely different subjects as the Hebrew Judith, the Roman Virginia, the rise of the Dutch

Republic, and the adventures of an imaginary *Siloret*. This last romantic story, a favourite with its author, resembles, by its texture, Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, and by its manner, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, as well as the more recent long-winded French productions of d'Urfé, Calprenède and Mademoiselle Scudéry, eagerly read in Poland when two French Queens in succession sat on its throne. Potocki, who was a good classical scholar, no doubt remembered, in writing his romance, that masterpiece of old Greek story of family and love adventures, the *Æthiopica* of Heliodorus, which had quite a vogue in Renaissance Europe, and were also translated into Polish at the time. But Potocki's actual impulse came from an equally popular Latin novel, the famous *Argenis* of the Scotsman Barclay, of which Potocki himself also produced a paraphrase in verse.

This persistent faithfulness to verse as a medium for literature of the most varied kinds is not only characteristic of the easy pen of Potocki. It is no less striking in the case of others : verse romances, in particular, which remind us of the mediaeval *romans d'aventure*, both by their rhymed form and their wildernesses of fantastic incident, flood the Polish book-market at a time when the foundations of the modern prose novel are already being laid elsewhere. In Poland, prose romances, though by no means absent, are less conspicuous, being mostly translations from French and Italian, and hidden away in manuscript, because largely of the indecent amatory sort. Verse stories are the thing to appear in public with ; even Count MORSTIN, whom we shall meet again among lyrists as a pioneer of the latest foreign fashions, follows the Polish tradition in romance by writing in verse his long love-story *The Princess Banialuca*. For sheer extravagance of fable, this novel, richer in rhyme than reason, surpasses the vast mass of similar verse by others, and the name of its heroine survives in proverbial



Polish phrase as a synonym for absurdity. Little interest, in fact, except that of literary curiosity, can now attach to such excrescences of the most exuberant baroque style in this kind of literature, as CHRISTOPHER PIEKARSKI's version of that wild Italian jumble of fabulous adventures of a would-be knight-errant and of preposterous travesties of classical mythology, *Capitano Spaventa*, an early precursor of the more famous Anglo-German Baron Münchhausen.

One of the things worthy of more thoughtful attention in this crazy forest of romances are the occasional asides and digressions of a truly manful poet and good citizen like Potocki, who interlards even his paraphrase of Barclay's *Argenis* with curious remarks and serious reflections on Polish conditions.

Such satirical excursions and moral exhortations are, indeed, a common feature of Potocki's varied work: from episode, they become the very substance in two more large books of his, which supplement the picture of Poland in war, as given in *The Chocim Campaign*, by a wealth of illustration of olden-time Polish life in peace. The first of them, called *The Unweeded Garden*, accompanies the author through many years of his life, and is in the nature of what in England was called a commonplace-book: a miscellany of story and observation, joke and sketch, note and record, maxim and meditation; a 'forest of things' or *silva rerum*, in fact, as Polish country gentlemen called their own domestic books of the sort, which they almost always kept. A second book of similarly wide scope, called *Moralia*, has more of a plan in it: on the model of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Adagia*, it takes common proverbs and sentences for its texts, and discusses them with less abundance of anecdote than is displayed in *The Unweeded Garden*, but more depth of thought, intensity of moral conviction, and trenchancy of social criticism.



The old Arian, though he returned in his later years to the Roman Catholic fold, does not spare the abuses of the clergy and the superstitions and bigotry of the laity. As unsparingly he lays his finger on the political evils of the state and the secular wrongs of society, from the disastrous elections of foreign kings and the disorderly and ineffectual Parliaments to the decadence of towns and the sufferings of the peasant. He is loudest in exclaiming against religious intolerance, and noblest in insisting again and again, with the limitations of a man of his age, but with honest sincerity, on the moral duties imposed by noble birth: *noblesse oblige*, in the highest acceptation of the phrase, might be the motto of all his moralizing, addressed as it was to his brethren the gentry. But like the great preacher Skarga, he often feels that his warning voice is not heeded, and he pathetically compares himself to an old watch-dog of the Commonwealth, whose barking is not heard by the slothful sleepers and floats unnoticed down the wind. The wind of history has carried this voice of old Poland's conscience to our modern ears, and we hear in its strong and perfect tones the very soul of the nation speaking.

## V

The manifold work of Potocki has carried us from the domain of epic poetry into the various fields of the *lyric*. The lyrical element predominates in the equally rich and multifarious inheritance of another characteristic singer of the age, VESPASIAN KOCHOWSKI. Soldier, farmer, and writer by turns, as full of ardent patriot pride as he is of grossest class prejudice, bigoted Roman Catholic and jolly pagan lover of life's good things in one, he certainly has the stuff in him to emulate the Roman Horace by the diversity of his songs, as he does by their outward garb of

*Four Books of Poems and Epodes.* His admired Polish model—the model of so many poets of this age of epigones—is the great Renaissance lyricist Kochanowski; like him, he is full of praise for the happiness of country life, and like him, he writes both laments and comic trifles, convivial and hunting songs side by side with religious and patriotic poems. The alternate triumphs and defeats, the domestic felicity and political disgrace of the Poland of his time are all re-echoed in his rhymes; he is less happy, though more productive, in devotional poetry, but most fortunate when the religious and the patriotic impulses combine to produce, in the prose lyrics of the *Polish Psalms*, collected towards the end of his life, a true reckoning of conscience both public and private, a survey of all the moral rise and fall in his own life and in national existence, a deeply contrite confession of sin for himself and others, as well as a jubilant hymn of thanksgiving to God for salvation from the direst dangers, and of confidence in His future mercies. In the same spirit of meditative recollection, but with the same buoyant hopes and chauvinist admiration for his country also, Kochowski busied himself in his declining days with a voluminous and unfinished history of his own time, called *Climacterics*, and reminding us both by its conception and scope, and by the stormy age it describes, of the similar historical work by Kochowski's English contemporary, Bishop Gilbert Burnet.

Both Potocki and Kochowski, with their exalted pride in nobility of birth, and patriotic aversion to everything foreign, and with their sincere moral uprightness and equally sincere personal religion, are typical representatives of the Polish country gentlemen's class, with its qualities and its shortcomings. Native characteristics and foreign influence are mixed in the charmingly spontaneous songs of another distinguished lyricist of the age, GEORGE

SZLICHTYNG, a Protestant and a courtier: while he uses the unpretending measure and simple rhetoric of actual folk-song in such a lyrical monologue as *The Bride's Farewell to her Mother*, and in another and most popular poem of his, sings the praises of *The Gentleman's Condition*, he emulates the grace of French models in the short lines and light rhymes of his paraphrase of Ovid's *Art of Love*, and his *Villanescas* are Polish imitations of an Italian type of frivolous verse.

Foreign elements predominate altogether in the poetry of Count ANDREW MORSTIN, higher in social rank, more refined in literary culture, and equipped with more intimate knowledge of the Western world than any of his brother singers of the age. An accomplished courtier and skilful diplomatist, he brought the 'airs and graces' of the beribboned and artificial post-Renaissance France and Italy from his extensive travels back to his country; he translated Tasso's pastoral *Aminta* and Corneille's *Cid* for the stage of the Court, and paraphrased in Polish verse the story of *Amor and Psyche* by the famous Italian Marini, whose *Adone* set a fashion in literature. Morstin himself became the most gifted exponent of 'Marinism' in Polish poetry. A master of the poetical filigree-work of such exquisite forms as sonnets and sestinas, madrigals and acrostics, he introduces into Polish love-poetry the new foreign note of elaborate compliment and affected tenderness, compatible with perverse sensuality very remote from robust realism. His influence as a moulder of the language into forms of most subtle if highly artificial beauty would have been more lasting, if much of his erotic verse had not remained unprinted, and did not remain unprintable even at present. As it is, he vanished, like a capricious elf of rare grace, from Polish letters, as he vanished bodily from his country, spending his later life in France. Some other

members of his very literary family cultivated lesser talents more conventionally and assiduously, and one of them at least, ZBYGNIĘW MORSTIN, deserves to be singled out for his rough-and-ready soldier songs, full of the terrible realities of war, which he all experienced in his own person, from hunger and disease in camp to wounds in the field and the torments of captivity. These campaigning songs supply an excellent realistic foil to the more abstract and general praises of Poland's victories in the long epics of Potocki or Twardowski. When joyfully preparing to exchange the sword for the plough for the rest of his days, and anticipating the delights of country life in song, the soldier-poet was rewarded for his services by exile, being an Arian; but even from Prussia his lyre did not cease to accompany by its notes all the good and evil fortunes of his country.

Having passed in review a gallery of gentlemen poets representative of such widely different aspects and characteristics of the governing class of Poland, we may well be not a little surprised to see emerging side by side with them, in this very seventeenth century, scholars, writers and poets of no mean order from the *burgher class* of the neglected and decaying Polish towns. It is good burgher stock in the old capital of Cracow—now forsaken by the kings for Warsaw—that gives one of its last great ornaments, before a period of twilight, to the oldest University of Poland in the person of SEBASTIAN PETRICIUS, the painstaking translator of Aristotle's *Economics*, *Politics*, and *Ethics*, and himself a political thinker of clear and critical common sense, and a sincere friend of oppressed plebeian classes. Again, it is a merchant family in that still wealthy centre of Poland's Eastern trade, the town of Lwów (Lemberg), which produces, in the person of SIMON SZYMONOWIC (afterwards ennobled), one of the most

refined scholars, courtiers, and lyric poets of the age. Distinguished by solid classical learning, he holds a high position among humanist poets as a Latin translator of Greek writings and an elegant original writer of Latin verse. He treats the biblical subject of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in the high style of Euripides' *Phaedra* in an extremely popular Latin play; in another Latin drama, on the classical subject of the Amazon Queen *Penthesilea*, he shows advanced appreciation of that new Renaissance ideal, the intellectual emancipation of woman. Exquisite classical taste did not forsake him when he turned to Polish verse, and, in his *Idyls*, produced the analogue to Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* in Polish literature—a perfect model for numerous successors in that field so widely cultivated in European poetry throughout the Classical period, the Theocritean idyl. Dead as this kind of verse has become in modern literature since the Romantic Revolution, the *Idyls* of Szymonowic retain a vivid historical interest, in that he, like Virgil (whom he occasionally even translates), makes the idyllic form the vehicle of political allusion and patriotic harangue and praise of great men of the time, such as the Chancellor Zamoyski, who was the poet's protector. More than that, these *Idyls* breathe a charm beyond austere classical abstraction, by their picturesque and loving sketches of Polish country nature, and by curious details of country custom, belief and ceremony, in one of them in particular, which describes a wedding. Another, showing two peasant girls at work in the harvest field under the burning midsummer sun and the cruel whip of the overseer, is marked by a depth of sympathetic insight into peasant mentality and a warmth of human pity with the peasant's hard lot which, outside Potocki, is rarely met with in the verse of gentlemen poets of the age.



Szymonowic is not the only burgher poet of the time. His 'fellow-townsmen of Lwów, and admiring follower in the walks of the Muses', BARTHOLOMEW ZIMOROWICZ, did not, like him, become a nobleman and a courtier, but attained high dignity among his own class as mayor of the town. In this capacity he did not spare his energies, his person, and his fortune, to tide his beloved town over many a critical period in that tempestuous age. One of the most terrible episodes in its history—the attack by the revolted Ukrainian Cossacks in 1648, and the heroic defence of the town—is commemorated, with telling realism, both in Zimorowicz's Polish poetry and in his elaborate Latin history of the city: his love of this old Polish town particularly appeals to the Pole of to-day, who remembers a Russian occupation and an Ukrainian invasion of it in recent years. Zimorowicz's *Idyls*, lower in poetic flight and more provincial in interest than Szymonowic, speak to the heart by the strength of his sincere attachment to his native plains, the somewhat melancholy beauty of their fertile riches, and their simple, sad and songful country folk.

More personal in tone than the classic Szymonowic, Zimorowicz, among the joys and griefs of his life, records in verse his loving pride in his younger brother, and his pain at the early death of this promising young singer. Cut off at the age of twenty, SIMON ZIMOROWICZ, by what he produced in his short life, worthily completes this remarkable *trio* of idyllic townsmen poets. His own *Idyls*, cast in the mould of country girls' love-songs, are not free from blemishes of classical artifice in expression, but as full as Szymonowic's own, of loving observation and vivid description of that ever-new miracle, the revival of nature in spring-time.

A host of other townsmen writers, mostly anonymous,



with less literary polish and culture, but much native raciness of speech and subject-matter, valuably supplement the idyllic poetry of the three chief burgher singers by realist and satirical pictures of actual town life in workshop and counting-house, bazaar and guild-hall. Here also, the *humour* of the nation comes freely and most drastically into play, regardless of conventional decencies and ecclesiastical barriers; hence the loss of much of this curious literature by public burnings of its products.

## VI

The same robust and unsophisticated humour gilds with its sunshine the pages of the one outstanding *prose classic* of the time. Above a crowd of *diarists* who people that new field of literature, telling us their strange adventures in this age of dramatic events, there towers the figure of JOHN CHRYSOSTOM PASEK, the Samuel Pepys of Poland. Last but not least in the motley crew of the century's gentlemen writers, Pasek, like many another of them, had fought in Poland's incessant wars in his youth, and they had carried him into Russia on the one hand, and as far as Denmark on the other. His later and more peaceful years were spent in the usual round of country gentlemen's convivialities and lawsuits, provincial politics and happy-go-lucky farming. He is not a reputable character: 'swashbuckler', the epithet recently bestowed on him by an English critic, is only one of many he deserved. His *Diaries*, with a frankness which disarms, reveal a man scrupulous in his devotions, but unscrupulous in pursuit of material gain; meanly quarrelsome with his equals and capable of brutality to the weak; with an eye to the main chance in love-making (punished for it at last by an elderly wife); professing the principle of disinterested service to his country, yet as selfish a guardian of the class privileges

of the gentry as any of his fellows, nay glorying in these obstacles to political order as in a mainstay of constitutional liberty; in this, as in other views, full of placid home-brewed ignorance, though fond of misquoted and ungrammatical Latin, and superstitious like a village gossip. It was over his cups (into which he was apt to look too deeply) that his Diaries shaped themselves, no doubt, as he held forth to his brethren on his adventures in his young campaigning days. Written down from such narrations, the Diaries have all the faults of improvisation: they slightly skip over years in some places, and heavily flounder among irrelevant details in others, and they certainly abound with the most monstrous lies on Pasek's heroic exploits in war, amazing oversea successes in love, and important and secret activities in politics and diplomacy. But they also have all the freshness of improvised narrative, all its glowing colour of daily occupations, local custom, and colloquial speech. The egregious Bramarbas is a born wit and God-gifted storyteller, and has left us in the manuscript of his Diaries (published, like Pepys, only in the nineteenth century) an encyclopaedia of Polish manners, customs and habits in the olden time, which is as true to life as it is amusing, and a story of adventure, which is as entertaining as it is untruthful. It was the great Polish poet Mickiewicz who called the book 'the first historical romance in the Polish language', and it certainly can challenge comparison with the great modern historical novels on seventeenth-century Poland by Sienkiewicz, one of whose characters at least—Zagłoba, the Polish Falstaff—bears an obvious likeness to the discreditable but jolly old diarist.

Pasek died in a hale old age on the threshold of the eighteenth century. Among a flood of earlier and later autobiographies and memoirs, one book only stands out comparable with his own by its wealth of illustrative detail,

and that one carries us farther down the inclined plane into lawless and riotous mid-eighteenth-century life under the unworthy Saxon kings. The author of this Diary, a priest of the name of KITOWICZ, lived to see new days of French enlightenment and resolute political reform on the very eve of Poland's ruin; but what he has preserved to us in his pages is another account of the old Poland in the native garb of its national character, still untouched by all these novelties. As credulous as Pasek is wilfully mendacious, as erratic in his narrative and as blindly ignorant of the historical importance of events, he displays perhaps even a broader and richer panorama of the country's life than the other, ranging from costumes and amusements, meals and furniture, to the camp and the court, the school, the law, and the church.

## VII

Coming to the end of this survey of the most eminent and still living things in a huge mass of printed and manuscript matter, we miss in seventeenth-century literature the glories of the *drama*, which by that time had reached, or even passed, its highest splendour in England, France, and Spain.

The life of the gentry, scattered over the countryside in their manors, and gathering only on occasion, did not favour the development of standing theatres. Better conditions were given in the towns, but these were in themselves decaying, and the monopoly of the drama for educational uses on the school stage cramped its freedom and conventionalized its technique; besides, school plays were never printed, and what survives of them in manuscript makes us feel rather thankful for the practice: only some lively interludes, interposed between more ambitious scenes,

can faintly attract us to-day by the realism of their types from actual life and the conversational ring of their dialogue.

Finally, the Royal Court, with its foreign elements—Swedish kings, and Austrian or French queens—patronized German and English comedians, French classical tragedy, and especially Italian opera and ballet, for which the Warsaw stage became even famous; but all this did not particularly stimulate Polish production. The Slavs, with the only exception of Croatian Renaissance drama with its Venetian inspiration, have so far shown little dramatic genius in their literary history, and the solitary Polish dramatic masterpiece of the sixteenth century—Kochanowski's Trojan tragedy, *The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys*—is not succeeded by anything worth comparison with it, for nearly two hundred years. A play conspicuous for literary skill, but all the more isolated for that, was written by one PETER BARYKA, and performed at Court after a coronation in 1637. It is called *A Peasant made King* and is remarkable as a version of the same old story which provided Shakespeare with the rough and primitive fun of the Introduction to the *Taming of the Shrew*. It is only by its caricatures of regional peculiarities of dialect and mentality in various parts of Poland that this Polish off-shot from a very prolific old comic theme has a particular claim on our interest to-day.

## VIII

In conclusion, the growing literary importance of one social factor must be pointed out as characteristic of the age. That factor is the *woman* in Poland. Polish woman was somewhat slow to emerge from the seclusion of her home, both socially and intellectually. Her education was purely domestic, and even in the Renaissance period, when

women of high learning and powerful character played such an important part in Southern and Western European Society and politics, the Polish translator of that famous book of manners, the Italian *Courtier* of Castiglione, was obliged to replace the brilliant lady conversationalists of the original by men, in order to be true to Polish life. Nay, even early in the seventeenth century a member of that enlightened sect, the Arians, actually produced a Latin disquisition *whether women were human beings*, a question perhaps not so startling as it may seem, since it is put, in disguised form, in a good deal of modern literature down to Weininger and Strindberg.

However, things were visibly changing. The presence of a large body of women who, though ignorant of Latin and Greek, were very desirous of reading matter in Polish, acted as a stimulus to vernacular literature as mighty in its way as was the popularization of devotion in the native tongue by the Reformation. And it was not only responsible for much devotional literature directly; it did not only give an indirect impulse to the rise of Polish pulpit eloquence to the heights of Skarga—it also constituted the strength of that demand for romance which we have seen so abundantly satisfied by the poets of the seventeenth century.

That century, finally, also saw a new departure in the first appearance of woman not as a reader only but as a writer also. ANNA STANISŁAWSKA, unhappily married in early life to an imbecile of noble birth, afterwards deprived of two succeeding husbands by untimely and tragic death, and sorely tried by other domestic troubles, in her old age gave expression, in autobiographical verse, to the noble force of an indomitable character which had carried her through it all, and incidentally illustrated Polish social life, manners, and opinions of the time by a mass of most curious detail from a sphere and a point of view not



represented in the whole wide range of contemporary literature. She is, in fact, a less-known female counterpart to that popular diarist Pasek, though her verse is as inferior to his prose as her character is certainly above his in honesty and respectability.

We have to travel a long way farther—well on into the eighteenth century—until we meet another lady writer of some distinction again. By that time blue-stockings had become more fashionable among Polish ladies, and one of the high aristocracy, Princess FRANCES RADZIWIŁŁ, not only owned (and really read) a library of 2,000 volumes, and wrote letters in verse to her husband, but translated French plays and composed original ones, based on old novels and romances, for the private theatre in the country residence of the family.

Her contemporary and Poland's first more eminent woman poet, ELIZABETH DRUŻBACKA, was her inferior in social station and literary culture, but her superior in talent. She followed the only path she knew from her reading—the well-trodden walks of seventeenth-century Polish verse—in copiously inditing rhymed stories of saints, fantastic romances of adventure, and occasional poems on her noble hosts and hostesses. Wandering, however, as a poor gentlewoman, from one aristocratic residence to another, she acquired a habit of observation, and this, when applied to nature, enabled her to introduce the new element of descriptive verse into Polish literature in a poem on the *Four Seasons* at about the same time when Thomson's poem on the subject made its appearance in the classicist literature of eighteenth-century England; other and less important descriptive poems on the *Four Elements* and *In Praise of Forests* followed. When applied to the high society she moved in, the same observant vein, coupled with Drużbacka's transparently honest nature, produced her best



work in her *Satires*. They are a plain and outspoken account of greater and smaller vices among the high nobility and even the higher clergy, and they do not spare such faults of the authoress's own sex as the growing mania for divorce, which, with other fashionable forms of French immorality, was changing very thoroughly the ordered, if provincial and old-fashioned, aspect of traditional Polish existence.

It seems a very far cry indeed from the simple rhymes and old-world piety of Drużbacka to the wide social sympathies and highly cultured art of a modern woman singer like Konopnicka. But here as elsewhere the seventeenth century—too long unduly despised—by producing the first specimens of woman's authorship, appears as a valuable evolutionary link between the early and the later glories of Polish letters.

## THIRD LECTURE

### POLITICAL REFORM AND LITERATURE IN THE ERA OF ENLIGHTENMENT

#### I

THE inward weakness and political decay of Poland, manifest even in the midst of the heroic glories of the seventeenth century, became yet more apparent in the early eighteenth. The lawless licence and fanatic obscurantism of the gentry, fostered by a corrupt constitution and a narrow Jesuit education, made a sad spectacle indeed of Poland during the reigns of two bad kings from the Saxon dynasty, who misgoverned and exploited Poland in the interests of their German home country. From a powerful actor on the stage of Europe, Poland now becomes degraded into an object of political bargains and dynastic appetites; a project of its partition is hatched as early as 1732, and what is worse, by one of Poland's kings himself, the Saxon Augustus the Strong, with the sympathetic concurrence of Prussia. In the five years' war of the Polish Succession, which follows the death of this king, Poland herself is the least active of all the powers concerned; and during the thirty years' peace which succeeds next, thoughtless and brutish material enjoyment prevails among the debased gentry, unmitigated by any flickering of civic spirit, and rarely sublimated by intellectual refinement. Literature, reaching its lowest depths both in style and matter, faithfully reflects the rottenness of society.

But even this darkest age is illumined by isolated noble minds which strive to lift the nation from moral ruin. ZALUSKI, bishop of Kiev, founds a famous library, which was afterwards carried away into Russia together with himself, and only at this present moment is about to be restored to Poland.

A great-hearted king, STANISLAS LESZCZYŃSKI, exiled into France by civil war, there writes his famous Polish pamphlet *A Free Voice to make Freedom Safe*, in which he urges the vital necessity of social reforms, embodied half a century later in the Constitution of the Third of May, 1791. An enlightened priest, STANISLAS KONARSKI, by establishing in Warsaw a model Public School, becomes the pioneer of that reorganization of Poland's educational system which was shortly afterwards taken in hand by the renowned Polish *Educational Commission*, one of the earliest Ministries of Education in Europe. Konarski also struck at the root of Poland's political evils by exhausting, in an elaborate treatise on *Effective Counsels*, all possible arguments against the absurd practice of the *Free Veto*, by which, in Poland, a protest from one single member could annul the decisions of any assembly, even of the Parliament. Konarski, finally, helped the rising Polish theatre to its feet by writing blank verse dramas in the style of the French classicists for his school stage.

## II

Such were the preludes to that mighty activity in political reform and literary enlightenment which adorns and redeems the last decades of old Poland's independent existence. The country seemed to turn over a new leaf with the ascension of STANISLAS AUGUSTUS PONIATOWSKI, who was to be its last king. Though a former lover of

Catherine the Great, elected under the pressure of Russian bayonets, and disgraced by many moments of political weakness in his later career, he ranks high among Polish monarchs by his personal culture and his intelligent protection and promotion of science, literature, and the arts. His court became a Polish Versailles, gathering the best minds of the age. And there were many such minds: the period of the partitions and fall of the Polish State is another Renaissance for Polish civilization by the magnificent blaze of manifold brilliant talent and successful effort. The light of Western Rationalism and the choice simplicity of Classic style distinguish a band of writers who devote all their splendid gifts to the one main task of teaching and warning, reforming and saving their nation.

They succeeded at least in enlightening and ennobling it, and thereby giving it force to survive the political catastrophe.

The moralizing and mentorial vein, so marked in the great writers of the sixteenth century, is strongly manifest again in this period in all domains of literature. Perhaps this is partly due—as has been suggested—to the fact that many of the most eminent authors of the age are clergymen, and therefore easily lapse into a sermonizing tone; but more probably the dangerous and decadent condition of the country, which is the common object of their care, inspires them above all with warning and precept. Whatever may be the principal motive, the moralizing and didactic tendency is certainly very prominent in such a monumental achievement of a patient and laborious pen as Bishop NARUSZEWICZ's voluminous *History of the Polish Nation*, carried half-way down the Middle Ages only, but nobly emulating, even in this unfinished state, the contemporary Western glories of Hume and Gibbon, Voltaire and Montesquieu. For the first time since the Latin work

of Długosz, centuries before, a vast mass of material for early Polish history was put together again; for the first time it was critically sifted, and for the first time presented in Polish, by one who had taught himself the manner of historical writing in translating Tacitus into his native tongue. The foundation for modern Polish historiography was laid.

Naruszewicz also wrote vivid and forceful *Satires* in quaint and racy Polish, exposing many evils of the time and the overhanging menace of destruction. But his *Satires* were surpassed in perfection of poetic skill and in lasting popularity by those of another bishop, IGNATIUS KRASICKI, the outstanding light of the Warsaw circle of *littérateurs*, and a true Polish Voltaire by the volume and variety of his works as well as by his grace of happy phrase and incisive boldness of free thought. *Minor poems* and large *serio-comic epics, satires and fables, prose novels and comedies, travel books and histories, journalist articles and moral treatises*, the first Polish *Encyclopaedia of universal knowledge* and the first Polish *outline of universal literary history*, a verse paraphrase of Macpherson's *Ossian* (one of many in Poland)—they all flow with equal ease from his restless pen, always distinguished by a lucidity and precision of style worthy of the greatest French models. And sometimes the 'dry light' of these is outshone by a hotter flame of patriotic emotion, as in Krasicki's eight-line hymn on 'the holy love of the dear native land', which every Polish school-child knows by heart. It was love of a country which he saw in a state of moral ruin that inspired the worldly-minded and courtly prelate with the pre-eminently satirical and didactic tenor of his writings. Endless and fruitless quarrels in the provincial assemblies and the Central Parliament of Poland are allegorically ridiculed in the comic heroics of Krasicki's *Battle*



of the *Mice and Rats*, a Polish analogue to that old *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* which legend has ascribed to Homer.

The ecclesiastical cloth, which the poet himself wore, is not spared by his satire in another humorous epic, *The Battle of the Monks*. This is directed against the slothful luxury and lazy ignorance of many monastic orders, and reminds us of Boileau's *Le Lutrin*. But it is much more poignant, and the satirist himself drew back a step by writing an *Anti-Battle*, in which he tried to limit the object of his attacks and lessen their violence; but the popular effect of the bold first work remained unshaken.

In a prose novel which followed—*The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Experience*—Krasicki showed up the disastrous consequences of neglected national education: after taking his unfortunately uncultured hero through a series of unpleasant practical lessons in life at home and abroad, much in the fashion of Voltaire's luckless *Candide*, Krasicki combines the inspiration of *Robinson Crusoe* and of Rousseau's *Émile*, in leading the same hero to physical and moral perfection through citizenship of an ideally simple and honest republic on a remote and lonely island. Another and more frankly didactic novel, with its scene laid in Poland only, presents in the figure and sayings of its hero, *Pan Podstoli*, an ideal picture of the Polish country gentleman, such as Rey had designed more than two hundred years before in his *Life of the Honest Man*. Incidentally, Krasicki's novel, by way of foil for the excellences of its hero, presents a painfully amusing gallery of foolish and corrupt squires, and a painfully curious, detailed picture of a neglected and unimproved country. This was the very highway towards satire, the field in which Krasicki shone most. His twenty-two *Satires* take us from the country scenes of his novel to the bustle of the metropolis and the Court. Eighteenth-century Warsaw, with fashion-



able French immorality let loose under the mask of enlightened progress in its high society, is truly alive in these entertaining but morally serious poems. Most of them, in the fashion of the old Roman masters Juvenal and Horace, deal with human and general sins and foibles, not peculiar to the poet's age and nation: with all their strongly Polish local colouring, Krasicki's Satires, like the emphatically political and topical ones of Dryden or of Pope, could, with slight changes only, amuse and please and be found applicable in almost any country and any period. Krasicki, in fact, like that old Polish moralist Rey, is more interested in the personal and private aspects of life than in social affairs or public duties. In one only, the most earnest and powerful of his Satires, *The Corrupt Age*, invoking his own 'honest satirical Muse' to 'speak the truth, and speak it boldly, with the same freedom which others use to indulge in vices or to rob the State', Krasicki becomes transfigured into a national prophet and reaches almost the height of Skarga's Sermons in foretelling the wreckage, in the mad day of one single generation, of the work of ages in culture, politics, and wealth. In the only other political satire Krasicki was later to write, *The Organ*, this exceptional impulse of political prophecy is already very much weakened: the good intentions of a Parliament which was setting about the gigantic task of reforming Poland, are mocked in a vein of pusillanimous scepticism, and, with a depressing resignation, the author ends by asking himself the question which of the neighbouring eagles it will be least painful to let ourselves be hacked by. This is characteristic of the author's own weak, yielding, and easy-going character, but by no means typical of the spirit which we shall see prevailing in other, though less brilliant writers of the age.

In the manner of his Roman model Horace, Krasicki

joins with Satire that most occasional and free-and-easy kind of verse—the *Epistle*. His Epistles, distinguished by as perfect flow and terseness of style as his Satires, deal with the most manifold events and subjects, from literature both as read and written by him, to such spectacles of the surrounding life as Army Manœuvres or a hunting party; and one at least of them, the first picturesque account in verse of a journey through the various provinces of Poland, retains its savour even for the reader of to-day.

But more perennially popular than either Satires or Epistles, which were after all characteristic of the epoch, are Krasicki's wonderfully laconic *Fables*, which belong to all time. Many of their teachings have become proverbial common property, such as these oft-quoted sentences: 'We govern the world, and women govern us', or 'Tis time to learn, the golden age is past!'—or this: 'Among good friends, the dogs devoured the hare.' The pathos of Poland, surrounded by 'good friends' who tore her to pieces, rings through this last. Krasicki lived to become a courtier to Frederick the Second of Prussia, and his own tragedy is reflected in the fable of two birds, one of which is merry in the cage, because born there, and the other sad, because bred in the freedom of the woods.

Krasicki's moral seriousness is not equalled, but his happy facility of diction, roundedness of sentence, and polish of verse are even surpassed by the fables, and occasional and descriptive poems of STANISLAS TREMBECKI, whom even the greatest of Polish poets, Mickiewicz, did not disdain to praise and follow as a master of language. And even Trembecki's somewhat shabby soul is set vibrating with patriotic emotion when the Four Years' Parliament meets which was to give Poland a reformed Constitution.

Another satellite of Krasicki's, WŁGIERSKI, more bold and violent than he in satire, and unable to stoop to mean

flattery like Trembecki, wrecked his life by disdainful pride and ended his young years in exile, having scattered his uncommon gifts in biting *pasquilli* in verse against the selfishness of the great nobles and the hopeless incapacity of the powers that be. The fascinating figure of this cynically outspoken poet inspired the modern Polish satirist Nowaczyński for a comedy, in which Węsierski figures as a sort of Polish analogue to Molière's 'Misanthrope'.

The ponderous Naruszewicz, the placid Krasicki, and the meteoric Węsierski are only the three most prominent figures among other and lesser satirists, who with equally upright zeal, though with less skill or fire, fight against the 'caterpillars of the Commonwealth'. And we shall meet with satire in the works of gifted writers who excelled in other fields. For satire was not by any means the only kind of poetry or of polite literature in which eminent talent was shown in this period. The coldly intellectual age also produced two lyric poets of singular tenderness and depth of feeling. One of them, FRANCIS KARPIŃSKI, has become no less popular than Krasicki himself with succeeding generations of Poles, by his Christmas Carols, and morning and evening songs of prayer, sung all over Poland to this day. His *Memoirs* are equally popular as a repertory of old-world Polish country life with its picturesque customs, immemorial traditions, jolly anecdotes, and devout and disciplined family habits. Karpiński's elegies, ballads, and love poems, echoing the sentimentalism which was rampant in the Europe of Rousseau, are sadly old-fashioned; but a genuine enthusiasm for the fresh beauty of the countryside affords relief, and the poet's frantic despair over the final partition of his country never fails to bring tears to the eyes of the Polish reader.

Karpiński lamented, but the second lyricist of the age, FRANCIS KNIAŻNIN, actually lost his reason after the fall of

Poland. It may be difficult for men of a happier nation to believe in such an extraordinary fact; and yet even this is surpassed by the equally authentic tragedy of the noble Thaddaeus Reytan, who as a member of Parliament had memorably protested against the first partition of Poland, and who took his life in utter despair after the third.

To return, however, to Książnin the poet. Residing, as a secretary and domestic tutor, at the court of the CZARTORYSKI family, who played a leading part both in the intellectual and the political reform movements of the time, Książnin accompanied by his verses all outstanding events in the Polish public life of his day. It was for the Czartoryskis' private theatre at their country seat of Puławy that he wrote the verse drama *The Spartan Mother*, in which patriotic eagerness to stir up his countrymen for the defence of the falling Commonwealth glows and pulsates through the classical subject. And he wrote of the Polish mother, too, as she dreams, in a cradle song over her child, of his future services to his country, and shivers with horror at the thought that he might grow up to become a traitor. Seeing such traitors around him, Książnin, in a noble *Ode to His Country*, deplored this falling-off from the high virtues of great ancestors; inspired with hope for salvation by the meeting of the Great Parliament, he ardently exhorted its members to unity and concord for the good of the sacred cause.

The old aristocratic family of the Czartoryskis, whose courtier Książnin was, showed unflagging active interest in all the vital social and intellectual issues of the day. One of the most striking figures among 'the Family', as the Czartoryskis were popularly called in Poland, was Princess Isabella, *née* Fleming, a woman of Renaissance type, adventurous in temperament, learned and vividly intellectual, and a great traveller, known in England and other Western

countries. She showed a true woman's intuitive understanding for 'the one thing needful' above all to the Poland of her day, by carefully superintending the education of the peasants on her estate, and even herself writing, after the partitions, the first popular history of Poland, *The Pilgrim of Dobromil*, a book eagerly read by children and simple folk until this day. This was bold and new indeed; and so was Kniaźnin's innovation in his poetry, when, under the influence of Princess Isabella, he introduced the refreshing element of peasant folklore into his idyls, and thereby showed the way to the coming Romantics. He did so in writing for the Czartoryskis' private theatre, too: in a dramatic idyl called *The Gypsies*, those homeless wanderers are audaciously presented to the wig-and-powder audience of the day, and pity for the miserable instability of their life as well as sympathy for their untamed spirit of freedom inspires some exquisite songs, not unworthy of comparison with those of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* in eighteenth-century England.

The mention of Kniaźnin's two dramatic works, as well as of the occasional character of many of his lyrics, has brought us to the two factors which, in the era of enlightenment, definitely took in Polish national life the place due to them in every civilized modern community, viz. the *Theatre* and the *Press*. Both began to flourish under the protection of the new king: the first public theatre was opened in Warsaw in the very first year of his reign, and about ninety periodicals were being published in Poland, many of them being modelled on the 'moral weeklies' of the English *Tatler* and *Spectator* type.

Both the stage and the press, and besides them, historical science, education, and other domains, were indebted for pioneer's work to a most versatile and active Jesuit priest, FRANCIS BOHOMOLEC. As an *historian*, he had the merit of



first editing a collection of sources of early Polish history. As a teacher, in the Jesuit school of Warsaw, he maintained a high standard of pure Polish language in a period when the language of the educated classes had become overlaid with a thick crust of needless borrowings from Latin, and was being fashionably interlarded with French words and phrases. Bohomolec went for his good Polish to the treasure-house of old Polish literature, to the classics of Poland's golden age, and encouraged his pupils to study them.

It was for the theatre of his school at first, and the Warsaw public theatre afterwards, that his ready pen supplied a long and successful series of well-meant, if mediocre, moralizing comedies. Written chiefly in imitation of Molière, they are rich, however, in curious Polish detail in the way of ridiculed old superstitions and prejudices, and certainly boldly generous in advocating the cause of the oppressed Polish peasant on one occasion at least, in the play called *The Good Landlord*.

As a journalist, Bohomolec is memorable in the annals of the Polish periodical press, as chief editor, for many years, of a moral weekly called *Monitor*, to which the best writers of the age willingly contributed, and which, combining unswerving consistency of principle with wit and grace of presentation, served the good cause of wisely reconciling sound national tradition and morality with enlightened Western progress and intellectual emancipation. It is in due remembrance and recognition of these historical merits that the official gazette of the new Poland of to-day has adopted the old title of *Monitor*.

Bohomolec did not stand alone, either as a theatrical writer or as a journalist. Besides the public theatre in Warsaw for which he wrote, there were private theatres not at the Czartoryskis' residence only, but at the courts

of one or two other noble families as well, whose members occasionally themselves tried their hands at writing plays, chiefly in imitation of French models, adapted to Polish conditions.

But both the literary pastimes of such high-born *dilettanti* and the modest, pedestrian work of Bohomolec as a dramatist and satirist, were surpassed by the most brilliant wit of the age, FRANCIS ZABŁOCKI.

As a poor official of the Ministry of Education, he added to his miserable income by the work of his pen. Like Kniaźnin, he fell into a deep melancholy after the fall of Poland, and becoming a priest, spent the remaining twenty-five years of his life in mournful brooding over the national disaster.

The same patriotism which plunged him in sadness in these later years had inspired him with wit in his earlier and merry days, as when during the long and at first unsuccessful debates of the Four Years' Parliament he daily scattered over Warsaw his fearless and biting squibs on those who impeded the great work of political reform and treacherously looked beyond the frontier for foreign protection of their dearly-loved class privileges: a satirical Plutarch, Zabłocki constituted himself biographer-in-chief of 'all our scoundrels, rogues, and villains', proclaiming pasquil justified 'when all their life was itself a pasquil' upon honest citizenship.

But these anonymous popular lampoons, though wittily written and nobly inspired, do not constitute Zabłocki's chief title to fame. Besides them, he is known as the laborious Polish translator of that masterpiece of eighteenth-century English humour, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and, above all, as the author of some sixty highly successful *comedies* in verse. He also, like Bohomolec, freely imitated Molière and his French successors, but he invested their persons

and subjects with the outward garb of Polish name and national custom, and he gave them inner meaning for his countrymen by intelligent application to Polish social evils. His plays form a comic panorama, which we behold smilingly, of all the weaknesses of eighteenth-century Poland, from the obscurantism of superstition in the country to the foppishness of the gallant of the town in Zabłocki's most famous piece, *The Dandy's Courtship*. The excellence of such a picture of country gentlemen's characters and petty quarrels, as Zabłocki's comedy, *The Old Polish Way* ('Sarmatyzm'), is only eclipsed in the nineteenth century by the masterpieces of Poland's comic classic, ALEXANDER FREDRO, who became the real Molière of his country.

Third with Bohomolec and Zabłocki there stands, in the chronicle of the Polish theatre, the worthy figure of the stage manager and actor, WOJCIECH BOGUSŁAWSKI. For many years head of the Warsaw public theatre, he became after the partitions a familiar personage in the theatrical life of all the principal towns in the three parts of the divided country, which his restless Thespian chariot visited by turns, thus protesting in the sphere of drama against the absurd cruelty of partition. Bogusławski, by a lifetime of highly meritorious effort both as an actor, translator, adapter, and writer of plays, gave breadth and width to Polish theatrical culture in making his countrymen acquainted with the masterpieces of the Italian, the French, and the English stage: it was he who first produced *Hamlet* in Poland. In his own work he showed the same noble social sense as Bohomolec before him, when, in the year of Kościuszko's armed rising and after the first victory of his heroic peasant soldiers at Racławice, he glorified the two most popular types of Polish peasantry, the hardy highlanders of the Tatras, and the cheerful

farmers of the plains round Cracow, in a most picturesque verse play, full of curious folklore and dialect speech.

Hopes of a better social and political future for his country, and eagerness to share in the work of building it up, animated Bogusławski like all the other eminent eighteenth-century writers. We have noticed as a common feature of their productions that they all strike the note of *political reform* again and again, as being the subject which more than anything else occupied the minds of the authors. We now pass on to the sphere of political reform itself, as attempted and represented both in writings and legislative activity by a group of writers and statesmen who deservedly rank highest in fame among all that noble band of eminent eighteenth-century Poles which is dealt with here.

### III

One of the foremost among them, STANISŁAS STASZYĆ, was unfortunately debarred, in the old Polish political system, by his burgher origin, from active influence on the nation's affairs. But his writings did more than almost anybody else's to pave the way in educated Polish opinion for the work of the Reform Parliament and its culmination in the Constitution of the Third of May, 1791. He prepared himself for a public career by extensive study and travel, ranging from Italy, Switzerland, and German Universities, to France, Holland, and English industrial towns. And he brought the full light of his foreign experience and learning to bear on the domestic problems of Poland.

Rousseau being the most universally admired European writer of the age, Staszyć draws on his *Émile* for educational theory, and on his *Contrat Social* for the theory of politics; he does not even disdain to popularize the

sentimentalism, made fashionable in the West through Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, by joining the busy swarm of Polish translators of the age, and producing a version of the cloyingly sweet French romance of Florian, *Numa Pompilius*.

But it was not for such by-work that Staszyc chiefly went to Paris: he there learned, and to good purpose too, natural science from Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, and natural philosophy of religion from the great Encyclopaedists: he afterwards translated Racine's didactic poem on the subject, and supplemented it by a version of Voltaire's 'Letter on Deism', which represents opposite and bolder religious thought. Staszyc himself, though a Roman Catholic priest, is an out-and-out Rationalist of the eighteenth-century type in his religious views. These, however, unite in his noble mind with a lofty morality of the type initiated by Shaftesbury: highest human happiness to him consists in promoting the good of his fellow men.

This warm-hearted philanthropy is, in fact, a distinguishing mark of Staszyc's personal, literary, and scientific activities.

It is in this spirit that he acts when, after the partitions, he sets a citizen's example by making a free gift of his extensive estates to the peasants dwelling on them; or when, on the other hand, he presents to the Warsaw Scientific Society a building in which that powerful organization of research resides even at this day: and the monument of the great Polish astronomer, Copernicus, by Thorwaldsen, in front of the building, is likewise a gift of the generous Staszyc to the nation.

The second principal characteristic of Staszyc's mind, besides this philanthropic inspiration, is his firm belief, shared with all the great men of the eighteenth century,



that the road to human happiness and progress lies through increase and diffusion of knowledge chiefly.

On this principle he acts when, after his return from his travels, he sets himself to supplement his foreign studies by observation of Polish nature and Polish life, unequalled for its loving diligence and scientific exactness of detail. This bears fruit in writings which constitute Staszyc the pioneer of modern Polish science in the most manifold departments, from physical geography to folklore. It is principally in the later era, after the partitions, that Staszyc displays a truly wonderful literary and scientific activity. As a Fellow, and afterwards a President, of the Warsaw Scientific Society so royally endowed by himself, he organizes its research work, and himself contributes to it in the most varied fields: in literature, by a translation of Homer's *Iliad*; in sociology, by a long didactic poem on *Mankind*; and in geology, by a monumental treatise on *Polish Mountains and Plains*.

But Staszyc's work, in this his most productive period, could fortunately expand beyond books and learning. In the scrap of Poland which temporarily regained some independence as the Duchy of Warsaw under Napoleon, and in the self-governing kingdom of Russian Poland after the Congress of Vienna, Staszyc at last could hold high public office, and work, not as a writer only, but as an organizer and administrator in the most varied departments of social life, such as: *statistics* (to which he himself contributed a standard work); *finance* (of which he, being a financier himself, showed both theoretical and practical knowledge); *industries* and *agriculture* (of which he was minister by turns); *education*, from grammar school to university (which he also superintended for a time, and reorganized); *musical studies* in particular (which he benefited by founding the Warsaw Conservatorium); care for the *deaf and*

*dumb* and the *blind* (which he promoted by establishing Institutes for them); *hospital* work (which he liberally supported out of his own pocket); *international politics* (to which he contributed a treatise on the balance of power in Europe); and last, not least, that ever-present subject of his civic zeal, *social reform*, with particular regard to the *peasant class*, which he never grew tired of advocating.

From these prodigiously multifarious and truly epoch-making services of Staszyc to Polish civilization in his later days we must turn back to his earlier and more limited endeavours in the field of political reform before the partitions, when, being able to serve his country only with his pen, he did so with truly wonderful power and effect.

In the same way as the poet Kniaźnin enjoyed the protection of the Czartoryski family, Staszyc was connected for many years with another old and nobly patriotic family of Polish aristocrats—the Zamoyskis. And that accounts for the fact that the first collection of observations on political problems published by him takes the shape of *Remarks on the Life of John Zamoyski*, the great King-maker, illustrious Minister, and far-sighted democratic citizen of Poland at the time of her greatest power in the sixteenth century. It was another Chancellor and a descendant of this great man, Andrew Zamoyski, who, when charged with the task of working out a new and reformed Constitution of Poland, gathered some of the best brains in the country round him as a body of advisers, and included Staszyc in their number. The project which they prepared failed to obtain Parliamentary sanction, owing to the class selfishness of the gentry, but Staszyc's political writings grew out of it as memorable results. His book on Zamoyski, dealing more with current Polish problems than with the historical person of the great statesman, was followed by another

and more urgent call to action in his *Last Warnings for Poland*. The first work was written before, the second after, the meeting of the great Parliament which was to reform Poland. The outbreak of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man left their impress of greater radicalism upon the second book; but in fact both works, however deficient in lucidity and centred power of style, are singularly distinguished by piercing insight and strong feeling on the subject of elementary and fundamental political necessities. Dictated by a firm sense of civic duty, they nobly fulfil, as actions in the only field open to Staszyc, his own great phrase that 'to become a citizen is to deprive one's self, and to devote one's will and personal power to Society as a whole'. Accordingly, they rise in appeal and indictment against the selfish oligarchy of the great nobles, whose discords had brought Poland to the brink of ruin, and whose lawlessness had morally degraded the minor gentry into a political proletariat. From this demoralized mass Staszyc's eyes turn to the rising generation, to the youth of his time, for hope and promise of better things. The cause of national education is one of the chief concerns of his patriot heart: full of praise for the work of the Educational Commission, he boldly wishes to see its province extended from public instruction even to control over private tuition and domestic upbringing. It is the education of character which he chiefly desires to promote for the general good of Society: 'nobody is born to be a slave, but everybody is born to obey'—this leading maxim of his educational thought was particularly appropriate in a country where too much individual freedom had become a mortal fault of the system.

In the sphere of political institutions Staszyc, though the influence of the French Encyclopaedists had made him

an ardent republican, was ready to conform to the traditional monarchism of Poland: so was the great national leader, General Kościuszko, who had brought back republican ideals from his service under Washington in America's War of Independence. Staszyc and all the other political thinkers of the period even desire to see the central power strengthened in order to raise the decayed authority of the State, and they strive for the abolition of the elective principle in favour of dynastic succession, because elections of kings had then for two hundred years been periodically undermining Poland's existence by civil wars and political bribery.

Here Staszyc, indeed, rises in insight above his French master in political thought. Rousseau, looking from the distance, had seen the old Polish Constitution in a different light when, at the invitation of a Polish Ambassador, he had written his famous treatise *On Polish Affairs*. His orthodox doctrinaire Swiss Republicanism could admire the outward Republican paraphernalia of the Polish State—free election and limited power of kings being foremost among them. Staszyc, viewing things from within, could better realize the disastrous consequences of election broils and of the weakness of supreme power in the State.

But it was another privilege of the gentry that Staszyc even more fervently wanted to see abolished than that of electing the kings: it was their unreasonable immunity from taxation, which burdened most disproportionately the other estates of the realm, crippled the exchequer, and prevented the formation of a strong army to defend Poland against her greedy and aggressive neighbours.

Together with exemption from taxation the whole privileged position of the gentry is to be reformed. It is in his second and more passionate book that Staszyc raises his voice most strongly on behalf of equal civic rights for

the burghers, from whom he came himself, and particularly for the enslaved peasants, whose abject misery he describes in a picture worthy of Dante's *Inferno*, and whose strength, even in statistical numbers, he extols as the mainstay of the country. 'Whatever institutions', he exclaims, 'you may establish in this Commonwealth, and whatever reforms you may introduce in its government, if you do not move this foundation-stone of feudal misgovernment, the serfdom of the peasant, the changes will only be superficial: they will delay, but not avert from the nation that disastrous period, that universal destruction, in which inner or outer despotism will overtake you all.'

Staszyc's sentiments on this as on other points were shared by others, whom their birth qualified not to write only, as he did, but to act also towards 'establishing institutions' and 'reforming the government'.

Foremost among those writers who had such opportunities to act as statesmen, there stands another enlightened prelate, HUGO KOŁŁATAJ, inspired like Staszyc with the philosophical radicalism of France. Hardly less learned than Staszyc, but more of a *perfervidum ingenium*, and distinguished by greater power and grace of writing, he was actuated, besides, in his splendid career, by the stimulus of an unquenchable personal ambition. This, in fact, led him astray; in Poland's last years he disgraced himself by a declaration of readiness, for the sake of promised promotion, to join the pro-Russian party, organized in the Confederation of Targowica; and memories of this fatal mistake being alive in public opinion, made it impossible for him, in his last years, to render similarly eminent public services to the Napoleonic Duchy of Warsaw, as Staszyc did.

But it is with Kołłątaj's, as with Staszyc's, earlier period that we are chiefly concerned here. He began his career



most brilliantly by reforming, root and branch, in the course of three memorable years, the old and decayed University of Cracow, which, thanks to this mainly, could become again a 'pillar of fire by night' in the darkness of the nation's later misfortunes.

This highly necessary reform of Poland's oldest seat of learning was but one of the many meritorious undertakings of the new *Educational Commission*, which, after the dissolution of the Jesuit Order by the Pope in 1773, took over from it the whole fabric, and the means, of national education, and in secularizing it, gave it an entirely new shape. Latin was dethroned from its all too dominant position in favour of the mother tongue as the principal humanity in the school curriculum; and not only Polish grammar and literature, but Polish history and geography, Polish laws and institutions came into their own in school, and in the book-market, too, which swarmed with textbooks of all sorts. *Non scholae, sed vitae discere*, 'to learn not for the school, but for life'—the watchword was truly realized in this reborn educational system. Kołłątaj himself, the University reformer, contrasted this new order with a very intimate and detailed account of the old one in an autobiographical work of his old age, *The Condition of Public Instruction in Poland in the middle of the eighteenth century*.

Let us return to his youth, however. Kołłątaj's capacity for greater things even than educational reform became apparent when, a Polish Junius, he captivated universal attention (under a mask) at the very centre of national affairs by a series of *Anonymous Letters* addressed to the Speaker of the Reforming Parliament, and outlining an entire programme of constitutional reform. The ideas thrown out here were cast into more systematic mould in Kołłątaj's later treatise, *The Political Law of the Polish State*,

and they were developed, in manifold detail, by Kołłątaj himself and a group of his literary friends in a number of writings issuing from an organization which called itself *The Forge*.

It was in this *Forge* of Kołłątaj's that the provisions of the Constitution of the Third of May, embodying his ideals of political reform, were ultimately hammered out. Kołłątaj himself was the real author of the Constitution, which he put into definite Polish shape from a French sketch of it, penned down by the King. He also, with two fellow-writers, defended it against foreign and domestic attack in a work on its history and on its fall by treason at home and violence from abroad.

As a writer, Kołłątaj, who reasons more coldly than Staszyc, carried less appeal to the masses by his elegance and eloquence, but the purely literary value of his books is undoubtedly higher and more lasting. With a thrilling power of vision and of word he makes us realize that the country is, in his own expressions, 'on the brink of ruin', and that 'now or never is the time to help it'. With the same impetus as Staszyc he works for a revolution without bloodshed, compulsion, or terror, making full use of what is valuable in the extant national traditions and institutions. Essentially of one mind with Staszyc on the principal issues, he shows more of a prudent and truly statesmanlike spirit of compromise in his actual proposals. Thus, he is wisely undemocratic enough not to wish to see even the whole unenlightened and debased mass of the minor gentry represented in Parliament, and he shows a clear grasp of financial and other possibilities when he puts the proposed figure of the standing army at 60,000 instead of the 100,000 which an enthusiastic Parliament voted indeed, but failed to raise and equip except on paper.

His final goal in it all is the same, and he is as firm as

anybody on the subject of emancipation of the oppressed classes as a *conditio sine quâ non* of political betterment. 'Poles', he finely exclaims at the very beginning of his greatest work, 'dare, for once, to be a nation, and a nation truly free! . . . And if we wish to be one nation, it is indispensably necessary that we should all be perfectly free, governed by good laws one and the same for the whole people.'

Koŋataj, in framing and pushing through a reluctant Parliament his proposals for reform, had a number of illustrious fellow-workers, whose names adorn the pages of Polish constitutional history. But one only need here be singled out as a third writer of equal power with Koŋataj and Staszyc, and of a wider range of literary gifts than they, because he used both prose and verse, journalism and drama, satire and lyric, with equal skill as the medium of progressive and patriotic ideas. This is JULIAN URSINE NIEMCEWICZ, who, from a young member of the great Reforming Parliament, and personal aide-de-camp to Koŋciuszeko during his insurrection, lived to see the other insurrection of 1831, and to become the associate of the great poet Mickiewicz and other famous exiles in Paris after it. He thus forms a link between two epochs of modern Polish history, and so do his writings, which extend over decades and take the reader from the period of eighteenth-century classicism into that of nineteenth-century romanticism, like those of Samuel Rogers in England. One of his later works, the *Lays of Polish History*, enjoys an equally lasting and well-deserved popularity among the youth of Poland as Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* do in English schools.

To the adult readers of the early nineteenth century Niemcewicz was continually present in all fields of literature as a translator and as an original writer, by *ballads* in the

manner of Percy and of the Germans, *novels* in imitation of Rousseau and of Walter Scott in turn, by *satirical comedies*, and by *tragedies* from national history, by *fables* and by a long *didactic poem*, by *travel books* and *political treatises*, by *personal memoirs* of his own and a collection of *historical memoirs* from past epochs. Much of this is, of course, as dead as Queen Anne to-day, but some of it strikes us even now as singularly far-sighted, as when Niemcewicz, in a realist novel *Levi and Sarah*, and in a fantastic one *The Year 3333*, foreshadows the development of a serious Jewish problem in modern Poland.

However, in the case of Niemcewicz again, as in that of Staszyc and of Kołłątaj, we have to envisage here his earlier period chiefly, when he was an ardent member of those who called themselves the Patriotic Party in the great Four Years' Parliament. He, like Staszyc, brought to his task of politician a rich experience of foreign travel: the sight of Britain's power had, in fact, first awakened reflections in him on the decadent weakness of Poland. In the *National and Foreign Gazette* he created and conducted, with a body of distinguished collaborators, the first periodical organ of advanced public opinion on political matters in Poland. Verse had been a pastime with him for long, before he put it to nobler uses in his masterly comedy *The Return of the Deputy*. It is a young member of the great Parliament of Reform—like Niemcewicz himself—who in this play, during a pause in Parliamentary proceedings, returns into the country, to become the hero of a conventional love-story, but chiefly to give the author opportunity for contrasting his patriotic ardour with the backwardness of average country squires in the person of his prospective father-in-law. Debates, as in Parliament itself, go on throughout the play, and give us an echo of the common talk of Warsaw and of Poland in those historical days:

the (now incredible) rhetoric of defenders of old disorder and licence is given full play to show its absurdity, and the fashionably snobbish imitation of everything foreign is ridiculed incidentally in a vein similar to that of Niemcewicz's predecessor Zabłocki.

But the noble aim of popularizing the doctrines of the patriots remains Niemcewicz's principal object, and the same devotion to the service of the good cause is the dominant motive of his other and less successful productions. In a historical drama he used the figure of the great Polish Prince of Peace in the fourteenth century, King Casimir the Great, to celebrate the final achievement of the new Constitution, and the living King's share in it. And when the same weak King shared in perniciously destructive work by acceding to the treacherous Confederation of Targowica, formed by the partisans of Russian intervention, Niemcewicz scathingly exposed their political crime in his satirical pamphlets *The Form of a Free Government* and *The Bible of Targowica*. And before he drew his sword to make a last stand by the side of Kościuszko, and to follow him into captivity and exile, he once more spoke as a poet in his elegies *On the Ringleaders of Targowica* and *On the Spring after the Second Partition of Poland*. His complaints were echoed by one of Poland's noblest sons, destined to be one of her greatest statesmen, Prince ADAM CZARTORYSKI, when he was compelled to leave his fallen country for the Russian Court, where he was to rise from the restraint of a political hostage to the dignity of Russia's Foreign Minister. In a youthful poem, *The Polish Bard*, he takes a forced leave of his dear native land, kissing with trembling lips the graves of fallen brothers, and invoking their holy shadows to guide him on his path of life.



IV

We have seen the best efforts of gifted writers and patriotic statesmen in eighteenth-century Poland all converging towards the work of the great Four Years' Parliament of Reform, and culminating in that *Constitution of the Third of May, 1791*, which crowned Polish political civilization.

What is this Constitution, and why is it remembered by Poles with such glory that its anniversary is a national holiday in the new Poland of to-day, and a reference to it headed the Constitutional Declaration of reborn Poland's Constituent Assembly on that very day in 1919?

The Constitution of the Third of May did not live long. It never came into full operation, and it was made a dead letter by armed Russian intervention before a year was out. Only four tragic years of national calamity separate it from the final dismemberment of the Polish State.

What is more: the Constitution was far from making a sweeping change in the antiquated structure of society, such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man made in France two years before it. It leaves to the gentry its privileged position, it does not grant to the towns full Parliamentary representation, it fails to abolish peasant serfdom.

What, then, are its merits? By what did it win praise from the greatest political thinker of the century—the English Edmund Burke, who congratulated the Polish nation upon it?

Above all, the Constitution lays the axe to the root with regard to Poland's most inveterate and worst political abuses, constitutional anomalies, and administrative defects. It does away with a source of civil war and corruption in the election of Kings. It wipes out the lawlessness of *liberum veto*, of the thwarting of the will of all by the self-will of one; it makes the Parliamentary deputy independent of instructions from his local constituency, and thereby

raises him to the dignity of a true national representative; it organizes administration definitely in the shape of a Cabinet of Ministers on modern lines, responsible before Parliament.

The Constitution certainly erred by following the national tradition of distrust towards the King and the great nobles, and not strengthening central government authority in the shape of the Crown and the Senate. It certainly showed timidity and a deficiency of the spirit of self-sacrifice on the part of the gentlemen landowners who were its authors, by not giving at once full freedom and possession of land to the peasant. It did not treat the burghers of the towns as they deserved to be treated, as the full-grown citizens which centuries of city civilization had made them.

Yet all these weaknesses may to some extent be accounted for by the extremely threatening international situation of Poland at the moment: it would not, perhaps, have been politically prudent to provoke domestic rebellion by too sweeping political changes, or to shatter the fabric of Polish agricultural prosperity by full emancipation of peasant labour, at such a critical hour.

As it was, the Constitution proved radical enough to furnish a pretext for foreign intervention. It had, at any rate, made a good and sound beginning in social reconstruction, by admitting representatives of the towns to Parliament in an advisory capacity at least, by removing some of the civic disabilities of the burghers, and by granting the towns a large measure of self-government, which was defined in detail in a Bill passed a fortnight before the Constitution itself. And a way was prepared for a better future to the peasant by placing him under the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts, instead of the arbitrary feudal jurisdiction of his landlord, and by opening up a possibility of free contracts between him and his employer.

It is by such new departures in the right direction that the Constitution shows the true road to all succeeding generations of Polish legislators, and deserves to be glorified as a model in our days. It fell with Poland itself; but the functions of emendation and further development which it entrusted to Reform Parliaments, to meet every quarter of a century, devolve, after the long pause of a century of captivity, on the Polish Parliament of to-day and to-morrow.

However, we deal with the values of the past here, not with the duties of the present or the possibilities of the future. In retrospect, the Constitution looms magnificent indeed, as a moral achievement which redeems old Poland from the reproach of having sunk into its grave in all the rottenness of faults unacknowledged, unrepented, unreformed. The importance of the Constitution for the historical estimation of Poland is excellently defined by the greatest Polish authority on legal history, Professor Oswald Balzer, of Lwów, when he says:

‘What we should be to-day without this Constitution in our history, it is difficult to think of without a shudder. And what we are through it, cannot be rated too highly. If we had fallen at the time of the Saxon kings, we should have been that dead body indeed, which it was only fit and necessary to bury, because it was rotten and decomposed all through. If we had fallen at the time of the first attempts at reform under King Stanislas Augustus, it could be said that an organism had perished which, after long lethargy, had begun to stir, but whether for new life, or in the very throes of death, was unknown. But after the Constitution of the Third of May? That Constitution had the effect that the year of the last partition came four years too late.’

These words of a great scholar are borne out by the whole record of unquenchable Polish national vitality through

the nineteenth century. A nation capable of the effort of this Constitution could not be killed by partitions. It had a deathless moral force in it, which it had shown ; and the World War has taught even unbelievers that Lecky was right when he declared : 'The essential qualities of national greatness are moral, not material.' It is not vain boastfulness that has inspired Poles throughout the period of their captivity to repeat, with obstinate belief, the words of the great eighteenth-century reformer Staszyc which we have seen so splendidly acted upon by himself after the partitions—the words : 'Even a great nation may fall, but only a vile one can perish.'

## FOURTH LECTURE

### THE EVOLUTION OF POLISH ROMANTICISM

#### I

THE great literary historian, Sir Walter Raleigh of Oxford, in one of his last memorable utterances<sup>1</sup> before he left the earth for the clouds, from which we now hear his poetic 'Laughter', spoke of modern Romanticism as bearing the same relation to mediaeval Romance as modern Classicism bears to the ancient Classics. He showed Romanticism as making its appearance in such a sphere as gardening, long before it comes to the front in literature. He further pointed out how Romanticism, as a revolt against routine, is a permanent and ever-recurring feature of all literary development, and how Classicism, conceived as discipline, is quite as necessary in art, and bound to come again and again.

While admitting both the Renaissance and the Romantic Movement to have both been prepared long beforehand by events and ideas, and, in their essence, neither isolated nor unique, the average observer still never will fail to be struck by both these phenomena, in their strength and splendour, as something in the nature of historical miracles. They both happen to the nations with all the dramatic power of revolutions. And inter-connected as we perceive them to

<sup>1</sup> *Romance*. Two lectures delivered in the University of Princeton, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Oxford University Press, 1916.



be by the same aspirations in different countries, they come both of them, in every particular land, in a blaze of productive genius springing up in so many great personalities at a time that the facts of each case, to whatever part of Europe we may turn, everywhere alike baffle all historical speculation on general laws of human evolution.

Poland is no exception to this rule of a marvellously simultaneous outburst of genius in the two great epochs. It has a golden age of literature in the sixteenth, and it has one again in the nineteenth century. If possible, the case of Polish literature is more wonderfully unaccountable even than some others, because Poland produces the poets, now acknowledged to be her very greatest, at the time when her political eclipse is most complete and seemingly hopeless.

There, then, we might well be content to leave the problem with regard to Poland as with regard to other countries. Humbly acknowledging the divine accident of genius, we can only resign ourselves, as historians of the Romantic Movement, to the more palpable task of laboriously tracing the workings of common European Romantic tendencies in the particular literary field of Poland.

What Romanticism in Europe generally stood for has been told so often that it is barely necessary here to mention by name its chief aims, watchwords, and literary characteristics. They are: a reaction of *imagination* and *feeling* against *cold intellectualism*; a cult of *originality*, and impatience of conventional *imitation*; a mystic *personal religion* opposed to the *rationalist spirit* of the eighteenth century; *Christian idealism* after the hard *classical realities*; a preference for *mediaeval subjects* after the domination of *antique themes*, the modern relativity of new-born *historical sense* as against the *logical absolutism*

of the Encyclopaedist doctrinaires; the relief of *national elements* in all their colours, after the abstract insistence on uniform *human nature*; the further relief of *natural scenery* considered for its own sake, and not as a background for Man only; finally, the embodiments of awakening *democracy in literature*, contrary to the *aristocratic individualism* of antiquity and of the Renaissance. This last capital tendency was foreshadowed in philosophy by Rousseau, before it came as Romanticism in poetry; it was crudely expressed in political action in the French Revolution, and it was the one strain which retained its vitality in the later nineteenth-century literary programmes of *realism*, after the exhaustion and extinction of the other elements of Romantic inspiration.

We shall not be surprised to find all these well-known principal features of European Romanticism reflected in Polish literature, as they are reflected elsewhere. But some surprises there are in store for us here, as there are everywhere else. 'When two are doing the same, it is not the same'—this holds true in literature as in other domains, and of nations no less than of persons. Apart, then, from the infinite variety of individual genius, the Romantic Movements of different countries naturally give different national shape to the Romantic doctrines, and a different degree of respective prominence to the sundry elements in them, according to the different conditions and different resulting psychology of nations.

Thus, the Romanticism of *England* is mainly a revolt of *personality*, that of *France* a revolt of *literary programme*, and that of *Germany* a revolt of *historical thought*. The Romanticism of *Poland* necessarily, under the hard conditions of national defeat and captivity, becomes a revolt of *nationality* chiefly, and being a matter of life and death to the people, and not a mere affair of

literary battles, acquires the gravity, the power, and the width of a religious creed.

From literature into politics, and from politics towards religion, lies the common and peculiar pathway of the Polish Romantics, and to illustrate how inevitably they all tread this identical road, the development of the three greatest among them may here be sketched in outline. Starting from different points of the large horizon of Romantic ideas, they all tend towards the same centre of a saving National Gospel in the end.

## II

It was the refreshing *folklore* element of European Romanticism that was the starting-point of ADAM MICKIEWICZ, the greatest poet of Poland. The publication of his first volume, the *Ballads and Romances*, a hundred years ago, in 1822, is usually marked as the definite outbreak of the Romantic Revolution in Polish poetry, quite as 1789 marks the outbreak of the long-prepared political revolution in France. A revolution both in the diction and in the subject-matter of Polish poetry was, indeed, accomplished by these poems, with their themes from Lithuanian peasant legend and custom, their simple strength and sincerity of feeling, vivid imagery, and fresh riches of phrase. But that was just what it was: a literary revolution. When Mickiewicz soars into the sphere of ideals common to him and his noble-minded fellow-students of Wilno University, these ideals are general and somewhat abstract ideals of all humanity—intellectual progress, creative reform, universal brotherhood—as in the powerful *Ode to Youth*, the glowing lines of which have never failed to inspire the vanguard of the nation with a confident sense of its powers. Even a few years later, the same general, human idea of the ‘daring, dash, and gran-

diosity' of youthful strength bursts forth, with all the consciousness of Mickiewicz's own rising genius in it, clothed in the fashionable Oriental mummery of the time, in his poem on the Bedouin horseman in the desert (*Farys*), composed in honour of an eccentric Polish nobleman who himself led an Arab's life in the East.

As these examples show, the supreme themes of young Mickiewicz's poetry, however enlivened by the infusion of youthful enthusiasm, provincial folklore, or exotic colouring, do not yet differ much in essence and idea from the highest inspiration both of ancient classics and modern classicists: the *Ode to Youth* is, in fact, as much akin to Pindar in structure, thought, and imagery, as the Odes of Thomas Gray in England. Nor is it a very decided advance in originality when Mickiewicz enshrines a deeply unhappy first love in a section of his fantastic drama *The Feast of the Ancestors*, which accompanies and expresses various successive phases of his life, as *Faust* does Goethe's. The scenes inspired by Mickiewicz's own love story breathe stronger and more sincere passion than had ever agitated Polish poetry before; yet even they are not free, in their attitudinizing and declamation, from suggestions of eighteenth-century sentimentalism of the stamp of Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* and Goethe's *Werther*.

Neither do Mickiewicz's *Love Sonnets*, written later and on another occasion, rise very highly above the flood of this kind of Petrarchian poetry in all the tongues and periods of modern Europe. They can only claim the merit—an emphatically Romantic merit, certainly—of re-introducing into Polish literature the form of the Sonnet, forgotten since the sixteenth century.

But poetry much more definitely, purely, sublimely Romantic in tenor, because more expressly national, was to come from Mickiewicz.

Three steps in the poet's life led up to it, and they all correspond to stages in the tragedy of the nation. The first of them is *imprisonment* of Mickiewicz himself and his University friends for cultivating their intellectual, moral, and national ideals in Societies similar to those which were then springing up all over Europe as a protest of the youth of nations against the absolutist reaction of the Holy Alliance. The second step is *banishment* into the interior of Russia, with full realization of national distinctness by way of contrast with the curious new surroundings. The third and final step is lifelong *exile* in Western Europe, with deep and fruitful meditations on the mystery of calamity which had befallen the nation in the meantime, when the insurrection of 1831 was quenched in the blood of Poland's heroes.

The national and religious beliefs which grew up in Mickiewicz's soul under the influence of these changes of fortune, stand embodied before the eyes of the nation and the world in the series of his great poetic works. Like Goethe's, they all mark stages of the poet's personal evolution, but, unlike Goethe's, they also mark the rise of Polish poetry into something more vital in national history than the literature of any other nation, except perhaps the ancient Hebrews, has ever been.

Mickiewicz has told us himself, in his dramatic poem *The Feast of the Ancestors*, how the Russian prison in which he found himself with his University comrades, transformed him morally from a singer of the personal woes of unhappy first love into one 'whose name was Million, because he loved and suffered for millions' of his countrymen, and put into inspired verse the substance of that phase of national history of which he was himself a great part.

The consciousness now awakens in him of a mission, of



the vocation to sing the nation's martyrdom and form its souls for endurance by the might of his Word, and the first rush of this inspiration carries him to heights of tragic 'hybris' in the *Improvisation*: Conrad, who is Mickiewicz, faces God himself, and asks Him, with the boldness of genius, for a revelation of the divine meaning of national disaster, and for a share in God's spiritual power over the souls and the fate of men. God's answer, denied to the blaspheming pride of a poet, is vouchsafed to the Christian humility of a friar. In *Friar Peter's Vision*, the patriotic religion which fills Mickiewicz's later life, first assumes definite shape: the ideal conception of Christ-like, redeeming dignity and world-wide import of the agonies of down-trodden Poland has dawned upon him and will haunt him, or rather lead him, and after him the nation, like a pillar of fire, through the night of Poland's cruellest persecution.

The dramatic poem which thus tells the story of Mickiewicz's growth into a national singer does not tell that personal story only. It is, in fact, incomparably more representative nationally, and thereby more intensely Romantic, than anything Mickiewicz wrote before. It harps back, indeed, to the early Ballads and Romances by its *leitmotiv* from folklore: the Lithuanian peasants' half-pagan rite of a feast for the dead, which serves as a symbol of unity of national tradition between the present and the past. But the poem takes us on to a wider and more varied scene of national life: it is full of memorable illustrations of the people's fortunes in the period: from the prison-cell talk and song of Mickiewicz's noble-minded young friends and fellow-sufferers on Christmas Eve, to the ball at the Russian Senator's, broken in upon by thunders of national tragedy, all the mighty ten scenes are a pageant of Polish struggle and suffering, as it went on in those days

and for nearly a hundred years after, both in the poet's University town of Wilno, and in Warsaw, and, indeed, throughout the large expanse of Polish territory, which all the brutish power of oppression did not succeed, then or later, in making Russian.

This inspired poetic picture of the nation's fate was not produced, however, before other events had left their formative imprint on the poet's soul. Years of wandering in Russia were the next factor among these. They taught him to fathom the gulf between the oppressors and the oppressed, between Byzantine orthodoxy and Western Christianity, between age-long despotism—grown, alas, but all too powerful—and age-long freedom—misused, alas, too often, and strangled by violence at last. The Pole, afire with all the liberal enthusiasms of a Europe maturing for revolution, wonderingly admires the 'slave's heroism' of the Russian peasant, so blindly and patiently bearing the yoke of an Empire whose strength he is. Both for the vast masses of the silent, toiling, suffering people, and for the gallant fervour of the Decabrists, who took the torch of liberty for Russia from Western hands and perished in raising it, Mickiewicz has words of sympathy warm and deep in his *Poems on Russia*.

But, however profoundly a human understanding moves him for all he sees around him in Russia, his heart again and again goes out to the distant homeland. In the Crimea, his eyes, dazzled by the splendours of rock and sea and sky, of mosque and minaret and palace, yet strain themselves to search the haze of distance for the humbler sights of his native countryside; amidst the 'dry ocean' of silent Akermanian steppe, his ear is intent to catch a voice from far-off Lithuania: and the *Crimean Sonnets*, embodying such moments, hide under gaudy Oriental colours an intense and lasting homesickness which was never, un-

fortunately, to be assuaged by return to the land of his birth.

Absorbed, together with his Russian friend, the great poet Pushkin, in the wave of Byronism passing over European poetry, Mickiewicz again cannot forget the cause of his country. He produced, indeed, in due time, a masterly translation of Byron's *Giaour*—one of the best translations in the Polish language. But he did another and more significant thing while he was in Russia. Himself compelled to work, for a time, in a Russian Government office in Moscow, and to conceal the inmost stirrings of his Polish soul, he chooses for the hero of a romance, in the Byronic style, from mediaeval days, the person of a Lithuanian who, under the assumed name of *Conrad Wallenrod*, insidiously enters the ranks of his country's enemies, the German Knights of the Cross, and leads them, as their Grand Master, to defeat and destruction. Similarly, Mickiewicz had, in an earlier epic from Lithuanian history, celebrated the heroic deceit of a woman, who, disguised in her husband's armour, leads his people to victory over the same age-long foe (*Grażyna*).

Thoughts of craft as 'the only weapon of the enslaved' were suggested by the helplessness of an oppressed people and by the atmosphere of conspiracy which the Russian police régime had produced all over Poland. Even later, in his homage to Polish mothers (*Do Matki Polki*), Mickiewicz poignantly pictures the situation—so often renewed and so long continued in Russian Poland—of a people whose supreme political art must be that of silence and the calm of deep-hidden resolution, whose martyrs die on gibbets, inglorious and unsung, and lie in graves unmarked and unknown.

Conspiracy, under continued pressure, at last burst forth into the desperate outbreak of an insurrection. The national war, valiantly waged for a year from 1830 into 1831 against

the giant army of Imperial Russia, was bound to end in new disaster. Mickiewicz did not take part in the war, but he became the foremost singer of its brave soldiers. In the verse story of *Ordon's Redoubt*, he celebrates a glorious episode in the final fight for Warsaw, in *A Night in Camp* he pays well-deserved tribute to the obscure heroes of partisan warfare in Lithuania; in *Emily Plater* we witness the soldier's death of one of them, who was a noble young woman. Into the few affecting stanzas of *The Soldier's Song*, finally, Mickiewicz breathed all the pathos of the exile of thousands of Polish soldiers into foreign lands after the defeat.

He was himself an exile for life in Western Europe now, and the sight of Paris, surging with crowds of restlessly unhappy and helplessly quarrelsome Polish refugees, suggested new themes for patriotic reflection. The need of definite patriotic teaching was patent. This was offered in *The Pilgrims' Books*, the highest literary achievement of Mickiewicz in the sphere of citizenship. In simple Biblical prose, in parables after the fashion of the New Testament, the book unfolds even to the humblest of Mickiewicz's exiled brethren his lofty conception of suffering Poland's heroic function and dignity, and it exhorts them to personal and civic virtue, to unity and to love, which is the highest wisdom and the most unconquerable power. No Pole, in the Babylonian century of the nation, could read this little book in exile without becoming strengthened and ennobled; and many thousands read it again and again, down to these last years of war and wandering. It will remain the purest source of national morality amid the new tasks and problems of free and united Poland, and accompany the nation on its path, as Christ's Word accompanies the Christian.

The thirties of the nineteenth century are the noonday

of Mickiewicz's political genius. The heroic combats of the insurgents of 1831 having been glorified by him in a number of shorter poems, the catastrophe of the insurrection having suggested sublime patriotic thought in *The Ancestors* and in *The Pilgrims' Books*, we might expect that this grandiose, if tragic, national event would inspire some great work, dealing with it directly and exclusively. But that did not happen : for his great epic, which became the national epic of Poland, for *Mr. Thaddaeus*, Mickiewicz turned back to the idyllic scenes of his childhood. Why he did so, he tells us, in most affecting words, in the epilogue to the work. The cloud of misfortune, hanging over the nation and darkening men's minds, was too heavy with fresh and terrible sufferings, for poetic imagination to soar into it. Nothing but despair was there ; and comfort was needed : it was sought in recollections of older days. From home-sick exiles' fireside talks on the Dreamland of early youth the epic was born ; there only, a shadow of untroubled happiness lingered still for Poles.

The outcome of such humble longings and familiar chats is modestly called 'a story from the life of country gentlemen'. Its narrow social sphere is the sphere of Mickiewicz's own boyhood : it surrounds with the glamour of cherished memories the petty incidents of a family feud between neighbouring landowners ; the landscape, the customs, are essentially provincial, and they are those of an outlying province, too, little known to the centre of Poland : it is not Poland, but Lithuania which is invoked at the beginning of the poem with all the power of heart's desire. Now Lithuania was the north-eastern borderland of the old Polish Monarchy.

And yet this unpretending verse chronicle of provincial life has become the only great national epic the modern world possesses. How can this be ? we ask with amaze-



ment. And the answer can only be the same which Scripture gives to a similar amazed question: 'the Holy Ghost', indeed, 'came upon' Mickiewicz, and 'the power of the Most High overshadowed him'. The mystery of Genius bears no explanation: the same reason which made ever-living realities of the simple allegories of a Bedford tinker, and of the popular plays dashed off by an actor from Stratford, has transformed into perennial types of Polish life the characters of obscure country squires, and it has made Lithuanian forests and fields as familiar as their own native town or village, to millions of Poles who never saw them at all.

But if this is 'all we know and all we need to know', when reverently acknowledging the presence of creative force, yet something more can be adduced as a contributory factor to account for the extreme popularity of Mickiewicz's particular native nook of Poland with all recent Polish generations. It was not Mickiewicz only that this province gave to Poland, and it is not the poetical magic of *Mr. Thaddaeus* only which makes Lithuania so 'near and dear' to every Pole. As the exposed outpost of Polish national civilization, it has been animated by particularly intense devotion to the national cause in the century of oppression, and particularly productive of great personalities embodying the nation's unquenched vitality. The ranks of the same class of Lithuanian country gentlemen from which Mickiewicz came, produced also Kościuszko, the immortal hero of Polish democracy, the leader of Poland's last fight for independence before the final partition. They produced, in Moniuszko, a Polish musician as distinctly national in his inspiration as Chopin himself, and second only to him in genius; and in Siemiradzki a great classical painter, who is the Alma Tadema of Poland. The same border country gave to Poland's Book of Martyrs the noble figure of Traugutt, head of the National Government during the last insurrection of 1863

(hanged by the Russians in Warsaw). And it is certainly characteristic that the first organizer of an armed movement in Poland on the eve of the Great War, the later Chief of the Polish State, Joseph Piłsudski, is also a native of that fame-crowned town of Wilno where Mickiewicz studied, and Moniuszko composed his operas.

In the light of these facts we admire in *Mr. Thaddaeus* not a creation of stupendous imaginative genius only, but the masterly representation of that particular element in Polish national life which concentrates in it the very life-force of Polish history during the age of captivity.

Mickiewicz himself has made the organic connexion between his modest subject and the great things of national history clear enough: the simple story is accompanied throughout by echoes of the thunders of Napoleon's wars, and the hopes and fears of the Poles who took part in them, live in the heart of every person of the poem. It ends with the arrival of Napoleon's Great Army in Lithuania on its way to Moscow in 1812. A country Jew's music on the cymbals is rendered in one of the finest passages of the poem, as summing up in it all the nation lived through and felt, from the fall of the old Polish State to what was greeted as its resurrection through Napoleon's conquests.

Alas, that hope had been baffled by Napoleon's defeat, and Mickiewicz woke up from the recollected ecstasy of those hopeful days of *Mr. Thaddaeus* to the reality of an enslaved Poland and a helpless emigrant community in Paris. And it was by victorious opposition of the indomitable spirit to the cruel facts of material existence that the saving national power of his genius henceforward chiefly manifested itself. *Contra spem spero*, 'I hope against all hope,' may well be said to be the motto of the mystic belief in Poland's immortality, which to Mickiewicz, as to the other two great poets, Słowacki and Krasiński, becomes

the religion of his later days. It is not all the actual suffering and slavery that matters : what matters alone is the miraculous power of the human spirit over the fetters of worldly existence ; and this power is again and again proclaimed by Mickiewicz, almost with the determination of Indian *Yoga* preachers, to the devoted, small circle of his disciples, in letters, speeches, articles, and gnomic epigrams, which are like a quintessence of the moral driving force of his life's work.

In this system of ideas Poland itself became an idea, a spiritual entity enthroned, intact and invulnerable, in the ideal sphere, above the welter of contemporary Europe's brutish international 'struggle for life' and 'survival of the fittest'.

This spiritual conception of Poland as an imperishable ideal force received a broad and substantial basis of historical generalization in the one great literary achievement of Mickiewicz's last years—no more a poem, and no more in Polish. The herald of Poland spoke to the whole civilized world from the new chair of Professor of Slavonic at the Collège de France in Paris, and in his *Lectures on the Slavs* he dwelt again and again on the historical mission fulfilled by Poland as the outpost of Latin Christianity and the bulwark of European civilization in the East, and he put it in strong relief, by emphasizing its contrast to the Russian Empire, with its Byzantine creed, Oriental despotism, and barbarian radicalism of destruction in every new phase of existence.

Believing in the invisible ascendance of spiritual powers and intellectual values, sacrificing poetry itself to mystic and idealist propaganda, Mickiewicz yet never became passively contemplative, as Oriental or Russian mystics do. He never ceased to feel strongly the need for action in the living present. With eagle eyes he watched from the heights

of his ideas the political development of European affairs, and waited for his opportunity. The revolutionary storm burst over the Continent, and Mickiewicz became an ardent liberal journalist in the French revolutionary organ, *La Tribune des Peuples*. But he became more than a pen-and-ink fighter. Italy, that 'second native land' of every civilized man, was rising against the Austrian invasion, and Austria was one of Poland's three foes. Mickiewicz rushed to Italy to organize an auxiliary corps of Polish volunteers there. It is difficult for a Pole to speak with calm of this truly heroic, though fruitless attempt: the poet's son has written its elaborate history, and a modern great poet, Wyspiański, crowned it with laurel in his drama *The Legion*. Even a greater opportunity than the Italian one rose before Mickiewicz's eyes a few years later, when the Crimean war aimed a deadly blow at Russia, then the chief oppressor of Poland. Mickiewicz flew to the Eastern theatre of war, and there disease struck him down, as it had struck down Byron, when about to fight for liberty. Mickiewicz died of cholera in Constantinople, on November 26, 1855, while organizing a body of Polish troops who were to fight against Russia.

The two military moments of the great poet's last years, and his honourable death in the forefront of an armed enterprise, complete the picture of one whose ashes have justly been laid to rest in the tombs of Poland's kings at Cracow, because he was more than a singer, even more than a prophet. He was—and for ever is, in his immortality—a ruler and a leader of his people. The path which I have endeavoured to outline as necessarily traversed by all Polish Romanticism—the historical path from *literature* through *nationality* to *religion*—in the one supreme instance of Mickiewicz moves on an even higher height, from *literature* through *prophecy* to *action*, and in this sense his guidance

to the nation extends far beyond the sphere of thought and writing. Well could Krasiński say of him after his death : 'To the men of my generation he was milk and honey, gall and blood of the spirit : we are all of his making.'

### III

The process of expanding a literary tendency into a national programme and thence into a religious creed is as apparent in its main direction, in the other two great Romantic poets of Poland, as it is in the life and work of Mickiewicz, though in their case it has not the ideal and almost unearthly simplicity, directness, and distinctness which give his person a legendary splendour in his fellow citizens' eyes. It is, however, a fact symbolical of the essential unity of purpose and unity of ideal with which all the three great Polish Romantics converge, in their later development, towards a national religion, that each of the three for a time, in person or at least in idea, belonged to the adherents of a strange and obscure enthusiast, Andrew Towiański, who actually founded a sort of patriotic religious sect among the Polish emigrant community in France. Towiański himself, at this distance of time, remains little more than a shadowy link between names greater and nobler than his own. What is lasting of the Tovianist creed lives in the pages of all the three great poets alike.

Mickiewicz had started from the folklore element, inherent in all Romanticism, as the most immediate approach towards a living conception of nationality. For JULIUS SŁOWACKI, the second great poet, it was strictly literary culture and literary art which is the starting-point and remains largely the tenor of his efforts towards the embodiment of high national and religious philosophy in perfectly melodious and richly imaginative verse. More



varied and many-sided in his literary interests and achievements than either of the two others, he is more of a professional writer than they; in his infinite variety, he carries more appeal to any foreign reader than does Mickiewicz or Krasiński; and in Poland, especially with more recent generations of writers, he has been truly 'the poets' poet', like Shelley in England. The sources of his inspiration range from Percy's ballads and Macpherson's *Ossian* to Shakespeare and Byron, from Homer and Plato's *Republic* to Dante and Calderon, and even Victor Hugo; and the subjects of his poetry run through a wide circle of human feelings, from love of nature and of woman—in his fantastic lyric idyl *In Switzerland*—to a despairing father's love of his dying children in his Oriental story *The Father of the Plague-stricken*, and to the tragic jealousy of a young wife's old husband, in two of his most powerful dramas. For he alone of the three is a born dramatist, and king, unto this day, of the Polish tragic stage. And the kingdom of his dramatic poetry is immense, extending from legendary early history, in the manner of *King Lear* or *Macbeth*, to airy spirits' regions like those of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*—all these different Shakespearian worlds being welded into one in Słowacki's great tragedies *Balladina* and *Lilla Veneda*. And from this half-fantastic, half-legendary sphere we pass in other plays of his, like *Mazeppa* and *Horsztyński*, and the *Golden Skull*, and the *New Deianeira*—into the realities of seventeenth and eighteenth century Polish life, public and private, in the noble's palace and the country gentleman's simple ancestral home, in the camp of fighters for independence, or in the park among sentimental wits of the age of Rousseau. Although subjects from national story largely prevail, yet essentially foreign themes are never strange to Słowacki's tragic Muse throughout his career: *Queen Mary*

*Stuart* in his early days, *Beatrice Cenci* in the maturity of his genius, and the Calderonian *Constant Prince* in the mystic twilight of his later years, are subjects of tragedies of his; one on the Scottish hero *William Wallace* is unfortunately lost, one on the Spartan kings *Agis and Agesilaos* remains a fragment; and even in the sphere of Polish prehistoric legend, in a fragmentary poetic drama on the dragon-killer *Krakus*, the founder of the town of Cracow, a foreign model, Shakespeare's history of *Henry IV*, is before the poet's eyes.

A king in the world of drama, Słowacki is a king also in a sphere hardly touched by the placid Mickiewicz, and left uncared for by the grave Krasiński—viz. in the realm of irony and satire.

Sheer grotesque horror is the element of the satirical gallery of Polish traitors which he shows us in a parody of Dante's *Inferno*, told by an imaginary Polish *Dantiscus* in the wildly uncongenial style of an old and half-crazy Polish country gentleman's drivelling and dolorous talk.

This is surpassed, in range and in power of effect, by his long and unfinished epic—originally begun as a picturesque drama in the manner of Goethe's *Faust*—on the exploits and wanderings of the eighteenth-century Polish adventurer *Beniowski* (who was in reality a Hungarian knight-errant, roamed from Kamchatka to Madagascar, and wrote *Memoirs* in French).

Written in the form of Ariosto, and conceived in the spirit of Byron's *Don Juan*, Słowacki's epic is, like the latter model, a comic museum of national curiosities of his own period. No work of Polish poetry is such a perfect encyclopaedia of national and international, literary and social, religious and philosophical problems and subjects of interest in the revolutionary period of the nineteenth century. The very historical *milieu* of the poem, the revo-

lution of Polish confederate gentry against Russian intervention before the first partition, gives ample opportunity for discussing revolutionary movements and issues of the poet's own day; and his sparkling wit plays relentlessly with the futility of all these contemporary 'storms in tea-cups'; the vain dreams of Pan-Slavist adorers of Tsardom, the helpless littleness of emigrant politicians, the petty police régime of Europe's reactionary governments—all come in for flicks from his satirical whip, and quickly vanish before his light laughter. He does not spare his own fellow writers on the Polish Parnassus, who did not spare him in their judgements: like Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, he lashes them all, critics and poets together, and even challenges, in a powerful passage, the great Mickiewicz himself, whose fame he always envied.

Desiring—and hoping—to obtain after death the power over his countrymen's souls which Mickiewicz exercised in life, he is in bitter earnest; for underneath the jester's garb of *Beniowski* a suffering heart is continually and painfully throbbing with the woes and the moral misery of a captive nation, and this ever-present subject of the poet's feelings many a time tinges with weary sadness and lyric melancholy the witty alarums and excursions of the glittering epic.

The same worm ever gnawing at his heart's core, often before that epic work, had eaten through the frame of any theme the poet took in hand. Passionate outbursts of patriotic sorrow or homesickness break in upon his delight in a grandiose panorama of history and landscape, when, like Byron, he is on a *Voyage to the East* and sings of it. Whether *At Sunset on the Sea*, or amidst the holy scenery of Christ's life in Palestine, or in the tragic gloom of *Agamemnon's Grave* in Greece, he is haunted everywhere

by mournful meditations on the fall of his adored country from its historical greatness. With none of the others is this one thought so much of a fever which preys on the poet's being and, indeed, burns him up in a flame of consumption at the untimely age of forty. Well could he speak, in his *Poetical Testament*, of a 'fatal force' in his poetry, which would for ever invisibly oppress his countrymen's souls, until it changed them 'from eaters of bread into angels'. The same 'fatal force' wrung from himself poetical accents of unequalled concentration of feeling and intensity of imagination. He has certainly more than the other two great poets of the divine inevitableness of strong, instinctive inspiration, and less of the reflective quality. This is manifest in the fiery rashness with which his temperament impels him to radical and revolutionary utterances on political and religious issues of the time, and even to words of bitter insult to his degraded and enslaved nation in such a poem as *Agamemnon's Grave*: such outbursts are the very blasphemy of limitless love, as the ravings of Shakespeare in his Sonnets to the Dark Lady. Extremes of passionate revolt against all stagnant traditionalism in national and religious life, and of as passionately Utopian belief in a violent change for a new and better democratic world, alternate in Słowacki's poetry with glowing enthusiasm for the chivalrous virtues and the sincere piety of the old Polish gentry. Ancestor-worshipper and revolutionary doctrinaire in one, he is both these opposite things together by the oneness of his love both for the old Poland, which cannot return with its charms and its faults, and the new Poland, which he so ardently wishes to make nobler and better. He clings to the glories of the past both as a priceless possession, which no foe can take from us, and as a model and earnest of new heroism and greatness in the future.

The same impulsive and enthusiastic true poet's nature—some critics have called it womanly in its receptiveness and sensibility—makes Słowacki, when he ultimately lands in the sphere of religious philosophy, become more of a rapturous mystic than the others: his prose treatise *The Genesis from the Spirit* is a dithyrambic rhapsody, in the form of prayer, on the all-powerful might of the spiritual element in the world, and it anticipates more intuitively the coming idea of Evolution than the limpid realism of Mickiewicz, or the learned philosophy of Krasiński was able to do.

Mystic ardour also runs to unparalleled lengths in Słowacki's later dramas from eighteenth-century Polish history—*Father Mark* and *The Silver Dream of Salomea*—where actual miracles are wrought on the stage by spiritual power in the midst of historical surroundings of a not very distant past, and through the agency of well-remembered historical persons.

Finally, in the crowning work of the poet's last days, the grand unfinished historiosophical epic *The King-Spirit*, it is the soul of the Polish nation itself, as embodied in various successive rulers, that is the hero of a vision of spiritual development of the race throughout the ages towards far-off perfection.

All this is, indeed, the 'fine frenzy' of a mystic poet's extreme ecstasy. And yet the same Słowacki, who saw more fantastic visions and dreamed more unearthly dreams than the other two great poets, could be at times even more essentially a realist than they, by the concentrated strength of his national feeling.

While Mickiewicz was seeking refuge from a terrible present in dreams of the idyllic past of childhood, and Krasiński in philosophical speculation on an ideal future for the human race, Słowacki, glorifying in his dramatic



poem of *Cordian* the conspiracies which led up to the insurrection of 1830, makes its hero throw himself from the summit of Mont Blanc on a drifting cloud towards Poland, and thereby shows his vivid sense of the unreality of all the literary and political activities in exile, and emphasizes the necessity of contact with the oppressed country itself and the living bulk of the nation, which remained on its soil. But this desire of vivifying, Antaeus-like contact with the mother country does not prevent Słowacki from throwing himself, heart and soul, into the noble work which great poets and high thinkers endeavoured to do for the quarrelling and leaderless Polish emigrant community in France. Nobody perhaps has better expressed and glorified the vital service of poetry to the nation in those days than he did in his drama from pre-historic legend, called *Lilla Veneda*, where, in Ossianic fashion, the fate of a nation is bound up with a mysterious harp played by an old harper-king: the chorus gives words to the meaning of this imagery and brings into fullest relief the importance of great national song for the very existence of a struggling, tortured, and resourceless people.

There is a peculiar kind of realism again here in the essence of thought, however imaginative the symbols. This distinctive realism of Słowacki's, a realism of pulsating fellow-feeling with his people, is perhaps most weird and at the same time most effective, in his earlier prose poem in biblical style, called *Anhelli*. Here he actually chooses the sufferings of Polish convicts and compulsory settlers in Siberia for his symbolical background—scenes of a hell from which the imagination of the two other poets shrank in horror. And in explaining his allegory, he also shows that particular realist grasp of essentials by strongly insisting on the idea of the People, the real mass of the nation as it is, being the only possible

factor and instrument of political salvation: others at the time looked for that to sublime ideas rather than to the living men.

Finally, in the same work, Słowacki in a third manner yet displays what I call his personal type of realist thought: he here gives more concrete shape than any other Polish thinker to the highly realistic belief that in a true Democracy, after all, the hero, the outstanding personality, fulfils his mission for the common good by sacrifice, by voluntary immolation of his entire self, and that he must not expect even a reward of approval and contented following from the crowd: he works their good in spite of them, and has to suffer for it. And the poet himself, much maligned and misunderstood by his contemporaries, certainly had a right to consider himself such a chosen personality, accomplishing a great thing for the nation through his living faith and his undeserved sufferings at the hands of his own people. What he proudly believed has come true: he became, and has remained, a greater power after his death than he ever was in his lifetime. His wish, expressed in certain oft-quoted lines, that the new, reborn Poland might turn its bright eyes on his lonely grave in remembrance, has been realized: it is acknowledged by all the nation now that he indeed made, as he says there, of the name of Poland 'both lament and prayer, and lightning and thunder'. Unlike Mickiewicz, he never abandoned poetry for immediate political or military activity: the word was his weapon to the end. Mickiewicz himself had shed prophetic glory round the national power of poetry, by an inspired apostrophe to the Romantic idol of Folksong in his early poem *Conrad Wallenrod*: that lustre of the national power of sheer song crowns Słowacki's achievement perhaps more exclusively than the works of Mickiewicz and of Krasiński.

## IV

In the case of Mickiewicz we have seen the national religion, which is the essence of Polish Romanticism, approached by the pathway of folklore interest, in that of Słowacki by literary imagination. In the third great poet, SIGISMUND KRASIŃSKI, we shall find it reached by the road of profound philosophical meditation on the great facts of human history. Wide culture and deep reflection are his marks, from his very precocious beginnings as a writer. It is no less than a miracle of early maturity of thought that a young aristocrat of twenty-one years of age, carefully shut off in his education from contact with other social spheres, should produce a dramatic epitome of the perennial aspects of social class war in his *Undivine Comedy*. In this wonderful work of social insight an imaginary conflict between Aristocracy and Democracy brings into full relief the rights and wrongs, the ideal nobleness and the actual meanness, of both sides; tragedy, but not without a moral triumph, is the end of Aristocracy—triumph, but not without a moral tragedy, is the future of Democracy, as foreseen by the meditative young count. His balanced judgement on both parties holds as true of to-day's relations between the 'classes' and the 'masses' as it held after the tremendous struggle between other 'classes' and other 'masses' in the French Revolution. The 'masses' of that time are the 'classes' of to-day, and the 'masses' of our period may, in their turn, be 'the classes' of to-morrow (as they are even now in Russia), but Krasiński's view of the substance of this spectacle has a permanent value which no new developments will take away. And the young man's view was not an inconclusive

presentation of facts only as his genius saw them: in the Hegelian fashion of the time he sees the *thesis* of Aristocracy and the *antithesis* of Democracy, both animated by class enmity and productive only of mutual ruin, followed in the future by a third state or *synthesis* in which love, not hate, will inspire mankind, and bear fruit in unity and happiness.

A more distant and yet similar field of great historical facts was taken under Krasiński's philosophical observation in his second dramatic allegory, *Iridion*. The downfall of the antique world in its wisdom and beauty, and the world-wide triumph of persecuted Christianity, that religion of the slaves and the outcasts, furnish the grandiose background for the dramatic story of the attempt of a noble Greek to bring about, by cunning and conspiracy, the overthrow of the imperial power of Rome and the deliverance and hegemony of Hellas. The undertaking fails, because the Christians decline to become Allies in a work of hate and destruction. The hero perishes, and reawakened after centuries to see the ruins of the old Empire and the decay of the new Papacy in Rome, is sent to expiate the hate and revenge which once inspired him, by another lifetime of love, sacrifice, and indomitable hope in the 'land of graves and crosses'—the Poland of the poet's own day. Thus a subject from antiquity is linked up with the problems of the modern world, and the leading idea of Krasiński, Christian love as the only possible mainspring of human progress, is brought out in even fuller relief than in the *Undivine Comedy*.

The same idea remains his lodestar on his further poetic voyage from seas of history on to deeper seas of abstract thought, metaphysical and moral. History is still about him when in his philosophical poem called *Dawn* he makes the ghostly figure of one of Poland's greatest warriors, the

seventeenth-century General Stephen Czarniecki, explain to men of this day the meaning of Poland's past, as foreshadowing, by ages of unselfish chivalrous defence of Europe, the greatness of an even higher love in the international relations of a truly Christian Europe of the future. And even the faults of the old Poland, which brought on its fall, are blessed here, as having opened a road, through purification by suffering, towards moral dignity and leadership of the Polish nation in the world of coming times.

Thus Krasiński, in his turn, stepped over the threshold of that temple of national religion, in which, like Mickiewicz and Słowacki and all the other and lesser Polish Romantics, he worshipped in his later days. His principal later work, called *Psalms of the Future*, with one and the same religious and lyrical exaltation breathing through it all, presents, in its distinct parts and different aspects, that system of Christian thought which had been consolidating in his mind since his early works. The *Psalm of Faith* looks back upon Poland's past and her historical mission, the *Psalm of Hope* forward to the era of fulfilment of her great work in the future. The *Psalm of Love*, in a restless time of wild doctrines of revolutionary violence and terror, dwells with firm assurance on the 'one thing needful'. Opposed by the radical Słowacki, in a beautiful and passionate poem, for its alleged cowardly want of confidence in the masses of a free people, it was, alas, terribly confirmed by the massacre of landlords by peasants in Austrian Poland in 1846, and Krasiński, in a *Psalm of Grief*, mourned, with all the best Poles, the want of true Christian spirit in the world of his day. He crowned his work in the *Psalm of Good Will*, praying for this highest and most essential blessing—good will within us—in addition to all that he saw of good both in the past and in the future of his nation. He supplemented his



message by exposing, in a poem called *This Day*, the fallacies, imperfection and one-sidedness of the current political party programmes. He summed up all the comfort he could offer to his countrymen in a sublime short poetic manifesto, *Resurrecturis*, and he unceasingly put to task a weakening talent, during his last years, in writing political letters, memoirs and pamphlets, or devout and mystical prayers and meditations, including a paraphrase of the *Glossa* of St. Teresa.

There is much of such by-work in Krasiński's career: romances in the manner of Byron, Walter Scott, and Victor Hugo, at the beginning, autobiographical fantasies and allegories in the middle, prose and verse treatises on philosophy in the Hegelian manner towards the end, and a profusion of love lyrics throughout. But freed from it all, his thought and his poetical vision, gaining shape even in his early correspondence with his English friend, Henry Reeve, and standing out in his more monumental works, appears to us as passing through the same evolution which we have found to be typical of Polish Romanticism as a whole: from mere literature, though very high literature, as produced by application of his genius to distinct social and historical themes from universal history in the *Undivine Comedy* and *Iridion*, Krasiński passes on to a great national conception in *Dawn*, focusing the light of all that historical wisdom on the problem of his country's fate, and thence he rises to the exposition of a national and international religion and morality in his *Psalms*.

## V

Having thus seen the same process repeated in the poetical career of all the three great Polish Romantics, we have one more question to ask ourselves. It is clear enough that to Poles the work of the great poets and of some lesser ones, not mentioned here, is more than poetry, that it is the life-blood of a great period of national history, and the holy sacramental wine of national and religious beliefs now and for ever.

But the question now is: Can the great Romantic poetry of Poland be considered as a subject of interest and importance for other nations, and for humanity at large?

A critical and negative answer to this question is likely to be given at once, even by an unprejudiced foreigner: the answer best summed up in the cruel words of a German school-fellow uttered to me in my boyhood, and never forgotten:

‘A literature written in a language so little known, and absorbed so entirely in national problems and ideals, can never become a world literature.’

A Pole must hope otherwise, and he has some grounds for his hope, which may here briefly be pointed out in conclusion.

Polish Romantic poetry is undeniably full of *nationality* and of the necessity for it. It all rests on the belief—right or wrong—that a national spirit is as unavoidable an ingredient in everything we think, do, or produce, as colour is inevitable in everything we see.

But the very greatest works of Polish Romantic genius at the same time teach the world that nationality need not be a limitation, but may become a stepping-stone to higher, to the sublimest things—to the conception of

Divine unity in the doings of man on this planet, and in the whole world process. National poetry, as these great achievements show, can be a revelation of the metaphysical truth of things, as all great poetry is in the view of poet-prophets and seers like Goethe or Wordsworth.

And in this sense and interpretation the work of Poland's great poets, national as it is in all the details of its poetical costume, may well claim an honourable share of universal human interest among the great literary works of the world.

## FIFTH LECTURE

### REGIONAL ELEMENTS IN POLISH ROMANTICISM

#### I

WHEN the Romantic Movement swept away uniform classical standards in European Literature, it substituted for them a new system of values. Foremost among these was originality, now to be one of the highest qualities in a work of art instead of the faithful imitation, which was the avowed ambition of the ancients and of their classicist followers. Originality was sought in the domains which folklore interest had begun to open up in the eighteenth century, and which the beginning growth of modern nationalism and modern democratic feeling favoured equally, viz. in the traditions, manners, and customs of the poet's particular nation, and especially of its country folk as untouched by cosmopolitan varnish; in the peculiarities of the country's landscape and wild life; in a word, in what the French Romantics afterwards appropriately called 'local colouring'.

The young Polish poets who, early in the nineteenth century, began to revolt against the dictatorship of Warsaw reviewers and professors, learned their lessons first from their German neighbours, then also from the great English Romantics, and looked around them in their different provinces for the picturesque folklore stuff which had acquired new price as material for poetry. And they found no lack of it wherever they sought: the peasantry of the various regions of which the divided Polish State had been composed, lived under the same conditions of rural simplicity

which had prevailed for generations, and with their village outlook and agricultural routine retained costumes and habits, games and rites, legends and superstitions, dances and music and songs which gave abundant food to the new artistic curiosity. Accordingly, the youthful singer who was to rise into towering eminence above his contemporaries, Adam Mickiewicz, began his career by freely drawing upon the country traditions of his native Lithuania for the stories of his first volume of *Ballads and Romances* and for the folklore trappings of his fantastic drama *The Feast of the Ancestors*.

## II

But there were others in the field beside him, and it is remarkable that one part of the old Poland in particular exercised a singular fascination over poets, whether born in it or not. That part is the *Ukrainian South-East*, the vast and thinly-peopled borderland of boundless wild meadows, scattered farms, savage ravines, broad rivers, and wind-swept open spaces, which had for ages been the battleground of Poles and Moslem invaders, and had become the home of a free and warlike, yet lyrically melancholy, population growing up out of waifs and strays cast out by the Polish feudal system. This world of the *Cossacks*, full of natural poetry and the romance of adventure, potently appealed again and again, throughout a brief life of rich and most varied poetical production, to the imagination of Poland's second great poet SŁOWACKI, who makes it repeatedly the scene of poems and plays, and creates noble figures representative of its spirit. To mention two outstanding instances only: his romantic and satirical epic, *Beniowski*, is interspersed with gems of description of Ukrainian landscape and lyrical reflections on its heroic graves and memories of war; and in his half-mystical, half-



historical play, *The Silver Dream of Salomea*, full of the horrors of a massacre of Polish gentry by revolted Ukrainian peasantry in the district of Humań in 1767, the gallant character of the Cossack Sava (who, in actual fact, fought together with the Polish Confederates against the Russian invaders) is an ideal image of border chivalry and soldierly uprightness.

But it is chiefly among the important *poets of the second rank* in Romantic Polish Literature that we must look for specimens of complete obsession with the Ukrainian scene. The fashion was set by the meteor-like figure of a poet who produced his one solitary and unnoticed work of genius within three years of Mickiewicz's appearance in literature, and died shortly afterwards, unknown to the Polish world of letters. This poet is ANTHONY MALCZEWSKI, and his work the poetic romance called *Mary*, which he himself describes on the title-page as an 'Ukrainian story'. The author was born and brought up, like that other great lover of the Ukraine, Słowacki, not in the Ukraine itself, but in the neighbouring province of Volhynia. What is more, he received an almost exclusively French education, and his youthful career, composed of military service and foreign travel, extravagant love affairs and duels, did not identify him with the traditions of any Polish province and its country life. Nor did his slight attempts at poetical journalism and insignificant short stories give promise of the excellence of his great poem, for which, only after the poet's early and miserable death, the judicious critic and brilliant writer Mochnacki established the position it now holds for ever on the Polish Parnassus.

*Mary* is a novel in verse comparable in its kind with the verse romances of Lord Byron, whom Malczewski learned on his travels to admire most intensely. He even met him personally in Venice and is said to have suggested to him the Ukrainian

theme of *Mazeppa*. His own *Mary* is distinctly Byronic in some of its highly-coloured poetical trimmings: as in Byron's *Lara*, there is the mysterious figure of a sad, silent, half-grown page, who accompanies the hero out of the poem into his further tragic life. And it is in the intentionally mysterious, disconnected and rhapsodic manner of Byron's oriental tales that the author tells a story which, both in this method of presentation and in its substance of fact, bears some resemblance to Byron's *Giaour*. It is based on an actual and most sensational occurrence, which was still within living memory in the author's early days. A great Polish noble of the powerful Potocki family, displeased with his son's marriage to a country gentlewoman who was his inferior in rank, had caused her to be carried away from her house by his servants in her husband's absence, and drowned in a pond. It was nothing but the bare skeleton of the facts which the poet took from reality: the figures were idealized and changed into something different from the real characters. The hero's father only remains the proud magnate he really was; the hero himself shows no trace of the same characteristics, which he afterwards displayed in real life to the extent of becoming a traitor to his country, and siding with its enemies, in order to abolish the reformed, democratic Constitution of Poland by Russian intervention. In the poem, he is a thoroughly noble and chivalrous youth, and his bride and her old father likewise become, under the poet's hands, noble ideal types of enchanting womanhood and reverend age, as they existed in traditional purity in the old-world atmosphere of Polish country gentlemen's life, before the eighteenth century brought French fashions in clothing and in manners. The entire events of the story, in fact, are removed by the poet into a more distant past: there is a glowing account of a fight with Tartar invaders—such fighting was common still in the seventeenth century, but no

more in the eighteenth—and it is as perfect embodiments of the older Polish virtues that the three tragic figures of the poem—the lover, the bride, and her father—chiefly move and charm the Polish reader; nor can he even deny his tribute of admiration to the sombre grandeur of family pride in the hero's father. The scanty number of foreground figures, upon whom all strong light is concentrated, gives this great romantic poem something of classic austerity; and the romantic picturesqueness of the Ukrainian background is never emphasized: it is only remembered in occasional touches, such as the description of a Cossack messenger on horseback chasing with the wind through the steppe at the beginning of the poem, or the lingering farewell to sad and forlorn graves on the wide and mournful Ukrainian heath at the end. In these and other details, the Ukraine is no more than an effective stage-setting, and the excellences of the poem reside in deeper and more general human elements than the romantic garb of local colouring, or even the Byronic style, which, being quite new in Polish literature at that time, made the poem unintelligible and unpopular at first.

### III

If there was anything distinctly Ukrainian in the texture of Malczewski's poem beyond mere externals, it was perhaps the persistent, causeless, constitutional *sadness* diffused over and through it all, as it was evidently diffused over the poet's career and life, and as it seems diffused over the limitless Ukrainian expanses themselves. A lyric mood is the inspiration that landscape breathes; and it is this ingrained Ukrainian lyricism which is the very essence of the whole prolonged and manifold production of a poet more consistently and thoroughly Ukrainian in substance than

Malczewski or any other Polish writer was—a native of the Ukraine himself, JOSEPH BOHDAN ZALESKI. Educated on the banks of the broad river Dnieper, he spent his youth in two worlds then peacefully united in his surroundings: among the minor Polish gentry who were his own stock, and among the Ukrainian peasants who peopled the countryside. Hence his lifelong devotion to Polish song on Ukrainian themes, to Ukrainian tunes, and in Ukrainian popular rhythms. He caught both tunes and measures and stories early from the traditions of the folk; it was in these traditions that the lawless life of the old Ukrainian Cossacks in their republican military community was clothed in a haze of poetic glory, and so it appears in Zaleski's pages throughout. It was the song of the country people which breathed all the melancholy melody, the brooding sadness, and the deep attachment to the boundless Ukrainian steppe, which is the life-spirit of Zaleski's poetry. All these elements filled even his precocious school-boy verse—he first appeared in print at the age of seventeen—and they became intensified when permanent exile gave to his love of the Ukrainian soil all the force of longing and homesickness. It was voluntary exile at first, when, with other youths of literary ambitions, he went to Warsaw to earn his literary spurs there. Even in the capital, in the midst of intellectual interests which form his mind and have his active share, he still harps on that one provincial string: it is at this time that some of his best short poems on Ukrainian subjects are written. For short poems are Zaleski's best; several times in a long life he attempts ambitious epics on mighty events from the history of the Ukrainian border, and always either lamentably breaks down and leaves the work unfinished, or fails in narrative skill and plastic power, even in the long-winded verse stories which he actually finished, and of which the longest were published only after his death. His genius is

most at his ease in short poems of the monologue kind, and in lyric stanzas on some isolated anecdotal event in Ukrainian history, round which he spins his reflections of exultation or lament. With their dramatic situations, the sing-song of their melody, and their depth of feeling, they are a peculiar substitute in Polish poetry for the Romantic ballads of other nations, and like the ballads of other European Romantics, are still popular subjects for recital. Such the *Farewell to his love before a battle*, put into the mouth of a famous Cossack leader (Kosiński); such the *Cossack boats on the Dnieper*, a song of Cossacks returning from an expedition across the Black Sea against the Turkish towns on the Northern Coast of Asia Minor; such *The Ukrainians' complaint for their dying Polish friend* (the General Lanckoroński); such, finally, the ballad on the joint expedition of a Polish Crown Prince and a renowned Cossack leader (Konaszewicz) against the Turks in the early seventeenth century. Charming as these poems are still to the ear, they form by their subject the most antiquated part of Zaleski's poetry. His reading of Polish-Ukrainian border history dwells too exclusively on glorious memories of joint heroic fights against the Moslem infidels; it consciously overlooks the no less persistent struggles of the hardy and freedom-loving Cossacks against the sovereignty of the Polish State and the family ambitions of great Polish nobles, who ruled like princes on their large Ukrainian estates; the memory of the leader of the great Cossack revolt against Poland in the mid-seventeenth century, Bohdan Chmielnicki—an outlawed Polish gentleman himself—is hateful to the poet, as it is to most Poles, being dear to Ukrainians on the other hand. With relations between Poland and Ukrainian nationalism having developed into the open hostility of to-day and yesterday, Zaleski must appear a Utopian dreamer to both parties. His distinguished biographer, the



eminent historian and critic of Ukrainian elements in Polish literature, Professor Joseph Tretiak of the University of Cracow, who died in March 1923, loomed like a survival from a period of idealism from which, in the modern effervescence of nationalism, both nations have unhappily drifted far away. It was in his young days that Poles who hailed from Ukrainian lands could popularly describe themselves as *gente Rutheni, natione Poloni*—‘Ukrainians by tribe, and Poles by nationality’—as was done by the esteemed historical scholar Professor Anatole Lewicki, at Cracow, who embraced the history of Poland and all phases of Ukrainian development in one standard text-book. It seems almost legendary to us now that there should have existed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a poet of the peasant name of TIMOTHY PADURRA, who made not Polish, but the Ukrainian country speech the language of his popular songs, and spent his life in mediaeval fashion as a wandering minstrel, reciting his poetry not among the peasants themselves, but in the palaces of Polish nobles in the Ukraine. His life appears like a dream, and like a dream it dissolved in the catastrophe of the insurrection of 1831, which shattered the splendour of an aristocratic residence where he had found permanent shelter. That residence was the seat of Poland’s greatest eccentric, Count WACŁAW RZEWUSKI, who, having visited the East, and fallen in love with it, deliberately lived an Oriental Ameer’s life on his estate, among Arab horses, Turkish costumes, Persian carpets, and Mohammedan prayers and songs, not unlike the late Wilfrid Scawen Blunt in England. We have met him before as the hero of Mickiewicz’s poem *Farys*, and his insurgent adventure in 1831, and consequent mysterious death in the steppe, inspired a magnificent ballad of Słowacki’s.

Side by side with this Romantic in actual life, it is fit to mention, in close connexion with the Ukrainian elements we

are dealing with, the similarly eccentric figure of a productive Polish-Ukrainian novelist, MICHAEL CZAJKOWSKI, who, in his many prose romances from Cossack history, dwelt one-sidedly on the noble and vain endeavours to establish unity and brotherhood between the Ukrainian Cossack community and the old Polish State, very much as Zaleski did in his poetry. But, unlike Zaleski, he endeavoured to translate his ideals into political action, and most fancifully too: he went over to the Islam faith, and under the name of *Sadyk Pasha* organized a force of Cossacks, with whom he fought on the Turkish side against the Russians in the Crimean War. He even went so far astray as to become the instrument of Turkey's oppression of Roumania, as Turkish governor of Bucarest. Returning to his native Ukraine in the old days, he turned renegade in another way yet, by actually becoming a Russian writer, and he ended his wild career by suicide in old age.

#### IV

We have wandered somewhat far away from literature into the romance of real life. Let us return once more for a while to ZALESKI and his endless, placid, lyrical contemplations of ancient Cossack glories.

There is one thing more to be said of them, from the point of view of modern literary criticism, and apart from all national antagonisms, and it is this: the militant old Cossack life, as idealized by Zaleski, filled entirely with adventurous warfare and random love, glorying in looting and revelling in drink, cannot well appeal, even in a poetic halo, to the reader of to-day. This is especially true of less distinguished literary products of Ukrainianism in Polish poetry than Zaleski's: the wearisome repetition of all this poetical Cossack machinery became quite a craze

in lesser poets of the period, and provoked the just wrath of one of the diehards of the old classicist school, Francis Morawski, who exclaims in verse, when tired of all this Ukrainian pageantry: 'By God, how long will your airs and graces continue to proclaim to us the tenderness of bandits and the charms of gallows-birds; when shall you have counted over all your idols, all graves and tombs and monuments and ash-heaps?'

There is more savour remaining in another class of Zaleski's shorter poems, where not history, but folklore, is the inspiration, and love of woman and love of nature, both apparelled in a motley garb of popular custom, tradition, and superstition, and both pervaded by the characteristic melancholy of the Ukrainian peasantry, are the principal subjects. These lyrics on the simple incidents, feelings, and observances of country folk are perhaps best characterized to the foreign student when they are likened to some of the typical pieces of that most Ukrainian genius among musicians, Tchaïkovsky. The generic names of *showmka* and *doumka*, coming from the sphere of folksong, belong by right both to the music and the poetry, and music is the very element of Zaleski's poetry, more exclusively than that of any other Polish poet. Connected sense is almost lost in sweetness of sound in two longer poetical fantasies of his of that type, in which a gossamer web of folklore fancies about wood-nymphs and bridges of flowers over forest brooks is spun round an early disappointment in love in the first, and round the thoughtfulness of advancing years in the second poem. The poet himself was conscious, as he puts it in a youthful letter, of 'dreaming away his years in fantastic realms of poetical delusion', and had no wish to awaken to life's realities.

He awoke to them, in his own way, when, a conspirator and an insurgent of 1831, he was doomed to spend the

longer half of slowly declining life in France. Like so many Polish emigrants and poets there, he sought refuge from national despair in mystic religious ardour. As his persistent vein of Ukrainianism thinned and became exhausted in the twilight of age, he grew more and more absorbed in ecstatic devotion as the only source of vague but unflagging hope for better things, and of faith in Divine justice amidst a darkened world. 'Less songful, and more prayerful', as he himself put it, is the proper *motto* of all his later poetry.

Two larger compositions of his later years stand out as illustrating this tendency. *The Holy Family*, an idyl on the subject of Christ's journey to Jerusalem at the age of twelve with Mary and Joseph, fascinates indeed, but sometimes fairly startles the reader by the delightful *naïveté* with which colours and features of Zaleski's beloved Ukrainian scenery are introduced into the landscape of Palestine, and homely talk, as in a Ukrainian peasant family, is made to pass—perhaps not too unfitly after all—between the sacred persons. The other large poem, Zaleski's effort at a philosophy of history in verse, called *The Spirit of the Steppe*, has some features in common with the higher and more powerful flights of Słowacki in his similar poem, *The King-Spirit*. Like that, it makes the mystic belief in transmigration of souls the groundwork for a great pageant of historical visions, ranging, in Zaleski's poem, from Roman antiquity and the birth of Christianity, through barbarian invasions and mediaeval romance, to Protestant Reformation and Machiavellian Imperialism, which finally lands us among the disasters of Poland in the poet's own day. Like Poland's greatest singers, he comforts the sinking spirit of the nation by the ideal belief that Poland is chosen by Providence for a high historical mission. But unlike them, he acknowledges, with deep and truly Christian humility.

the historical Poland's grave sins and errors, and beholds her punished and repentant, to be ultimately forgiven and saved. Unlike the others, too, Zaleski's scheme of history is, of course, distinguished by the peculiarity that the Ukraine looms large here also—larger than it can ever look on the canvas of the universal historian.

This brings us, finally, to one particular trait by which Zaleski's poetry occupies an almost solitary position in Polish literature, and that is his brotherly sympathy with the wide Slavonic family of peoples. Ideas of Slavonic community of interests or aspirations, even of the collective importance of Slavdom in culture or in politics, are generally distasteful to Poles because of the necessary predominance, in any such conception, of the overwhelming Russian factor; and this has adversely affected even the study, by Poles, of the literature and life of their other Slavonic fellow-races. Zaleski is one of few exceptions in hailing, with hearty joy, the awakening of Slavonic national literatures and historical research in the nineteenth century; he contributes to their popularization in his country by versions from the Czech, and by a complete translation of the magnificent heroic ballads of Serbia; and he looks ahead—fancifully, as some may think even now—to an important part to be played once again, as it was played for centuries of history, by Poland in the midst of a more united Slavonic group of nations. In this view of Poland's position among the Slavs, as well as in his enlightened and broad-minded vision of coming greatness for the Slavonic element in the world, he approached the unique intuition of genius shown by Mickiewicz in his Paris Lectures on the Slavs, and that is one of the reasons why very high praise—perhaps too high—was lavished by that uncrowned king of Poland upon his humbler brother Zaleski, both in these lectures, and in poems and letters to him.



## V

The *Fata Morgana* of Slavonic brotherhood in general, and of Polish-Ukrainian unity in particular, never vanished from Zaleski's mind. No such illusions concerning Poles and Ukrainians were present in the ardently patriotic and radically democratic soul of his contemporary and fellow-insurrectionist SEVERIN GOSZCZYŃSKI, the third great Polish singer of Ukrainian subjects. On the contrary, his wild and mournful verse romance, *Kaniów Castle*, is full of the horrid historical reality of hatred, both tribal and social, between the proud Polish noble and the hardy Ukrainian Cossack peasant. Grim realism places him worlds apart from Zaleski in his treatment of the same themes. Born in the Ukraine, like Zaleski himself, but not so favoured by fortune, bitten with small-pox and with poverty, he early acquired the hardness of character and judgement which comes of struggle with adversity; and a natural impetuosity of temperament was goaded into fanaticism by the contempt shown to a son of the smaller gentry at the court of a great noble of the potent Sanguszkos family. An adventure of the rash youngster—an attempt to wander on foot to Greece and share in her combat against the Turk—involved him in seven years' homeless wanderings about his own native Ukraine, and it was during this period, which gave him true familiarity with wild nature, that his poetry first struck really personal notes: if in his later great poem a Cossack holds mysterious converse with a rustling old oak in the Ukrainian forest, it was in those wayward years that the author learned the language of such talk. And it was the experience of bitter refusals and inhospitable diffidence which embittered his disposition, quite as, on the other hand, the life of a vagabond gave him more actual insight into the mentality of the peasant

people and the living traditions of the country, than any amount of book-learning could have done.

All this, together with the fashionable extremes and ravings of Byronism, went to the making of his epic story *Kaniów Castle*. It tells its events in the same intentionally rhapsodic and allusive manner which Maleczewski had adopted from Byron's *Giaour* for his *Mary*. But it does not idealize the outlaw and his violence, as Byron's *Corsair* had set the fashion of doing. The Ukrainian Cossacks in it are quite as cruel, bloodthirsty, greedy, and lawless as they really were—as they are in the Russian Riepin's famous picture, which shows a circle of their savage figures dictating to their hired scribe a threatening letter to the Great Turk. While the men are ferocious and revengeful, the women are indomitable and passionate. Mad intensity of human emotions is the constant atmosphere of this poetical night-piece, and it passes into actual madness in the fate of one of its two heroines; ghastly pictures of murder and torture are frequent: one of the heroines kills her husband, the other one lives to see her lover impaled. Drunken demons dance at the foot of a gallows-tree, spirits of dead unbaptized children moan in the air, witches gather nightly dew, and vampires suck human blood. And the unswerving determination of the author in drawing, with firm hand, the image of a chaos of elemental savagery is comparable with the rugged stoicism of Emily Brontë amid the human hell of torment in *Wuthering Heights*. Nor are the representatives of the ruling and more civilized nation—the Polish gentry in the poem—a whit less primitive in their instincts of lust and greed, atrocity and revenge, than the Ukrainian Cossacks. Goszczyński gained assurance in his terrible task from the consciousness of drawing a still possible reality, and the poem indeed makes strangely prophetic reading in the flaring light of the orgies of ruin

rapine, and murder perpetrated in those very regions by the peasant populace in our days at the beginning of the Bolshevik period. 'Still the same peace, and the same crimes again'—this final line of the poem, in fact, strikes an accent of even wider foreboding when read amid the turmoil of the 'Peaceless Europe' after the great war. The only relief afforded at intervals is found where the poet himself found it in his restless career: in communing with the eternal and imperturbable life-force of nature, and her ever-renewed miracles of beauty and creative power. But even the impassive immutability of nature's wondrous pageant here has something of the 'terrible composure' in it with which the heath of Wessex in Thomas Hardy's novels beholds the frantic human puppets. And the fact that the story is based on the unspeakable historical horrors of the great massacre of Ukrainian-Polish nobility by revolted peasants in 1767, sets a blood-red seal of authenticity on this nightmare of crazy fantasy. The accusations hurled by the Cossack hero of the poem at the governing Polish gentry are so terribly true that it is difficult to imagine the mental agony and the fierce resolution of the Polish poet who penned them down.

## VI

Goszczyński, with his fiery spirit, was of course one of the first who kindled the torch of insurrection in 1830. But, differently from the others, he spent much of his later life not abroad, but at home, chiefly in the Austrian part of Poland, where life at last became possible. There also he died, as the last Mohican of the Romantics, in an age of widely different literary and political ideals, in 1876. He published a translation of *Ossian*, when Ossian's European vogue and influence had been dead for half a century; and

in a prose treatise on *The New Epoch in Polish Poetry* he protested vigorously against apish imitation of German and English models, and upheld the Romantic fetish of originality, bidding the Poles look round in the Slavonic world for sources of original and congenial inspiration.

He reminds us of Zaleski by this Slavism of his. Like him also, and in fact like all the Romantic poets, great and small, he sought comfort from the crushing blow of the insurrectionary defeat in mystical musings; and, more extreme and violent than the rest, in this as in other things, he made the authentic figure of a mad hermit of his time, who haunted an old ruin in an out-of-the-way district of the country, the hero of his most important later work, the rambling prose poem *The King of the Castle*. With the full fervour of an out-and-out mystic he idolizes the mad enthusiast as the only healthy being in a corrupt materialist world, diseased with cold calculation. To the necessary compromises of Poland's statesmen with the partitioning powers since the Congress of Vienna the noble madman opposes unflinching faithfulness to the principle of revolt, and with kingly condemnation of modern meanness he couples far-sighted prophecies of coming democratic upheavals. The crash of revolutionary hopes in the defeat of the insurrection is symbolized by the crumbling and fall of the walls of the old castle; but the unshaken revolutionary doctrinaire finds new comfort among the sound and strong fundamentals and caves of the building, which are an image of the poet's belief in the strength and vitality of the fundement of the nation—the peasant people. But even the democratic radicalism of the poet's youthful convictions gave way in this mystic period to intuitive insistence on individual moral perfection and self-sacrificing universal love. In the name of Christ he roundly renounced the materialist belief in political revolution and social war,

which he himself had advocated as a pamphleteer and a conspirator; and in numerous pamphlets and tracts he now heralded his enthusiastic religion, not indeed as a kingdom of rapt contemplation, but as the only sound basis for a noble working morality—passionate man of action in this to the last, and the strongest imaginable contrast to the lyric dreamer Zaleski.

While Zaleski lingered out an unproductive age in overworking his everlasting Ukrainian themes to monotony, Goszczyński resolutely turned to 'fresh woods and pastures new' in his later Galician home. The bare and majestic rocks of the Tatra mountains on the Hungarian border appealed to his proud Stoic nature, as they have since appealed to many of Poland's singers. He described an excursion into them in a memorable *Diary*, and he made them the scene of an unfinished, half-epic, half-fantastic poem, *St. John's Eve*, as full of the popular fables and legends, customs and superstitions of the highlanders as his earlier epic was of Ukrainian peasants' folklore. Here, as there, the background was historical—dim reminiscences of a Tartar invasion—and here, as there, the central figure is a bold, idealized outlaw. In the present instance it is no less a person than the renowned *Janosik*, a real robber and smuggler of that mountainous region, whom both Polish tradition on the northern slope of the Tatras, and Slovak tradition on their southern side, has shaped into a sort of Robin Hood, and who, after Goszczyński, figures prominently in all modern Polish poetry connected with these fascinating mountains. In a prose story, which he also placed among these mountain scenes, Goszczyński presents a hero and a mood nearer to his own time and to the personal ideals of his revolutionary youth: a mysterious fiddler, who by his playing awakens in the mountain people thoughts of a great democratic rising against Poland's oppressors, is



a symbol of the many emissaries of Emigrant Revolutionary Committees, with whom all parts of Poland fairly swarmed on the eve of the European storm of 1848.

## VII

The person and work of Goszczyński have carried us bodily into other regions of Poland from his native Ukraine. The Tatra mountains, which he was the first to sing, are the only district of Poland which, in more recent times, can boast of a crown of poetic laurel as splendid as the threefold one by which Malczewski, Zaleski, and Goszczyński have made their Ukraine glorious.

For *Lithuania*, Mickiewicz stands almost alone, and he also turned in his later work from the Lithuanian peasants and their folklore to the Polish country gentry, and the national aspects of the people, and the universal aspects of the landscape. Of all the young Lithuanian bards who surrounded him, like a Pleiad, in his brilliant student days, none rose into literary eminence, and some went as far afield in the world, and away from home and from Polish literature, as ŻEGOTA-DOMEYKO, who earned the confidence of South Americans as a Professor of Geology, and was elected Rector of the Academy of Santiago de Chile.

Among the later-born, W. SYROKOMLA (L. KONDRATOWICZ by his real name) is like a faint echo of Mickiewicz's own later vein—the vein of his great epic *Mr. Thaddaeus*—in that he faithfully and honestly sings, in largely conversational and pedestrian verse, the praises of the poor and peasant-like Polish country gentry of Lithuania, from which he himself came, and which gave to modern Poland some of its greatest men, much as 'the poor, proud homes' of Scottish country towns and villages—justly honoured in Sir James Barrie's Rectorial address—gave to English

civilization. And the humble and dreamy Lithuanian country landscape of field and wood and lake and river is dwelt upon with as rooted, clinging love in Syrokomla's poetry, as the plainest features of English scenery are in Wordsworth's.

When we turn from these outlying borderlands, the Ukraine and Lithuania, to provinces nearer the centre of Poland, we find that their singers are either not great enough by talent, or not provincial enough in their local peculiarities, to be truly representative of their distinct regions.

THEOPHILE LENARTOWICZ, a sculptor, and surrounded in later life by all the artistic glories of Florence, sings to the end with as persistent fidelity of his brothers, the peasants of the province of *Masovia*, in the heart of Poland, as Zaleski in France sang of his Ukrainians. But his peasants are idealized as much as Zaleski's Cossacks, and have more of the poet's own profound reflective piety and tender brooding in them, than of the real peasant's indomitable sense of reality, his shrewd simpleness of thought, and all-enduring elemental fatalism.

Similarly the peasants of the *Cracow* country, who figure in the gaudy colours of their picturesque costumes in the poems of EDMUND WASILEWSKI, and speak in the spirited, dancing, short stanzas of their own folk-song, are vivid figures in delightful *genre* paintings rather than the strong and go-ahead men of actual life.

In the case of other peasant enthusiasts among poets, like WOLSKI, a propagandist tinge of democratic fanaticism removes their verse from the sphere of hard realities; with others still, as in the case of ZMORSKI, faded colours of belated and imitative Byronic extravagance make the picture unnatural in effect. It was only when the rising *realist novel* had led to a thorough revaluation of Romantic

ideals and to a general change in literary methods, that the Polish peasant of various provinces, as he really was and is, made his powerful appearance in the modern songs of MARY KONOPNICKA, JOHN KASPROWICZ, CASIMIR TETMAJER, and other more or less realistic poets; and WYSPIAŃSKI, the greatest of them all, could, with a prophet's vision, interpret in his dramas the social and political bearings and meaning of this peasant factor.

### VIII

We are concerned with the earlier Romantic period here. But on account of that very difference between those days and the realism of moderns, one more highly original and truly Romantic figure must be mentioned here in conclusion, as standing midway between the two epochs, with all the glowing enthusiasm of the Romantic in his cheeks, and all the loving scrutiny of the modern scientist in his gaze. VINCENT POL, poet and geographer in one, is memorable and significant in many ways. Born as the son of an Austrian official of German nationality and a mother of French emigrant descent, he did not even speak Polish correctly at the age of eighteen, and he began his career as the author of a manual of German literature in German, and teacher of the German language in the University of Wilno. And even later he paraphrased Polish folksong in German verse. And yet this same wonderful person illustrates the vitality of Poland, even in its time of eclipse, by becoming, in a way, the most Polish of poets, even to unreasoning and narrow idolatry of old Polish national traditions. He fought in the insurrection of 1831, and immortalized its heroism in a book of soldiers' songs (*Pieśni Janusza*), which have only partly been replaced in popular favour by the new war-born Polish soldier songs of to-day.

But what is more astonishing, Pol remained for a lifetime, and was immensely popular for a period as the unwearied and unflaggingly admiring singer of the feudal and chivalrous ideals of the Polish gentry, the ruling class of the olden time. Identified with the men of that age down to their narrowest prejudices, he is too uncritical a praiser of past times, *laudator temporis acti*, too old-fashioned in his tenets, to be more than benevolently smiled at by the modern reader, and the very monotony of subject, and limitation of social outlook, spoils his many longer poems from old Polish country gentlemen's life for the taste of to-day. But Polish to the core as he is in it all, he is certainly a more representative exponent than any modern Polish writer, of all the sterling values and the clear-cut national distinctness of the historical Polish world.

It is not this side of his work, however, which is most strongly emphasized and most highly praised when Pol is spoken of in his country to-day. He lives for ever as the author of a classic of descriptive poetry, *The Song of our Land*, the greatest success ever achieved by a Polish poet in the difficult task of popularizing national geography in rhyme. His flowing, short, rhymed couplets, known to every Polish school-boy, made distant parts of Polish country and distant sections of the Polish nation familiar to whole generations separated from them by hostile frontiers. While absorbed in admiration of ancient Polish chivalry dead and gone among political and social changes, Pol had ever since his youth kept an attentive eye open to the unchanging background of those vanished glories, the land he lived in, as the Poles of the olden time had lived in it. Political persecution drove him hither and thither, from one part of Poland to another, until he burst out into a song which was to sum up all the loving observations of

land and people collected on his wanderings. The poem is not a poetical encyclopaedia of Poland. As in most of the regional poetry of Polish Romanticism, the more or less virgin soil of the Eastern borderlands, from Lithuania to the Ukraine, where old habits of life and the primitive aspects of nature had suffered least change, comes in for fullest treatment and occupies most of the space. Next to these lands, prominence is given to the majestic Tatra mountains, at the feet of which Pol lived for a time, which he explored more eagerly than anybody at his time, and which fascinated him as a poet, as they did so many of his successors. The central plains of Poland are scarcely touched, and the Western provinces, with their rapid economic progress under Prussian rule and their tenacious unconquerable Polish nationalism, are omitted altogether: the poet himself, in due apology to them, added a prologue in honour of the Prussian Poles when he was their guest. With all these deficiencies, however, the poem has been a mighty factor in keeping alive a sense of the unity of all old Polish lands, and the passionate attachment of many Poles of to-day to the Eastern provinces which they have never seen—a feature which may well surprise a foreigner—is in many cases due to ringing memories of Pol's verses on Lithuania and Samogitia, and Polessia and Volhynia, and Podolia and the Ukraine, as learned by heart in childhood.

The poet supplemented his picture by a less finished and effective *Song of our Home*, dwelling chiefly on old customs and manners; but he was more successful when he matched the verse classic worthily by a prose one in *The Huntsman's Year*. This account of the wild life of Polish nature, as observed by the hunter through all the changes of the seasons and the pageant of the months, is more fully comprehensive, and occasionally much more



picturesque and imaginative in detail, than the quick and sometimes superficial flight over Poland in the poem. And *The Huntsman's Year* met well-deserved luck in finding a truly congenial illustrator in Julius Kossak, who is in the history of Polish painting almost the exact analogue to Pol in poetry.

Geography, far from being a mere passing breath of poetical inspiration, became the serious scientific interest of Pol's maturest years. He was the first modern Professor of Geography in Poland's oldest University, at Cracow, and in ponderous volumes *On North-Eastern Europe* and *On the Northern Slopes of the Carpathians*, as well as in his more literary and picturesque *Sketches from Life and Nature*, he laid the foundations for that complete study of the Polish country which in the re-united Poland of our days becomes really possible on a large scale, and is zealously pursued in the voluminous works of such indefatigable investigators as Professor Eugene Romer, of Lwów University, and many others. Antiquated as they naturally are from the point of view of science, Pol's geographical writings are now being taken down more and more often from the dusty upper shelf by admiring Polish geographers, ethnographers, zoologists, botanists, geologists, who all of them honour his memory as a pioneer's with almost the same respect which surrounds the older figure of Staszyc, that great awakener of scientific interests and industrial activities in earlier modern Poland.

It is in this reborn fame of Pol the geographer that we behold the most suggestive and arresting literary spectacle of early nineteenth-century Romantic glamour passing, in unbroken historical transition, right into the modern light of common day.

## SIXTH LECTURE

### THE AGE OF REALISM

#### I

ROMANTICISM, in all countries of Europe, was a literary revolution, corresponding to the series of political revolutions started by France in 1789, and continued there and in other lands in 1830 and 1848. Being of the nature of a revolution, Romanticism everywhere has something of the revolutionary denial of reality; it defies and denies accepted standards and conventions, both social and political, religious and moral, national and philosophical, literary and artistic. It has necessarily more than elsewhere of this revolt against reality in it in the case of Poland, because there, after the partitions, reality was hell, and acceptance of it meant danger of national extinction; and furthermore, because, after the insurrectionary defeat of 1831, Polish poetry is the poetry of exile, and the emigrant atmosphere of Paris gives to its subjects the airy substance of dreams and desires, of Faith, Hope, and Charity, rather than Knowledge, Fact, and Action.

But reality, defied by Romanticism, inexorably came into its own again, and *Realism* inevitably grew out of Romanticism in the later development of European literature. Its coming was brought on by political facts also: revolutions more or less successfully resulted in the establishment of a new liberal order of things, and quite

as the victorious and satisfied middle class, which had made those revolutions, now settled down into the political realism of Parliamentary work, so did Romanticism, when it had carried its revolutionary ends in literature, pass into Realism of literary manner almost of itself.

In Poland the course of events was different and more tragic, but the effect fatefully the same as elsewhere. In Poland, Revolution was successful in literature only, not in political life: the youth, brought up on Romantic poetry, attempted a second insurrection in 1863, which ended, as it was bound to end, even in greater disaster than the first one of 1831, and now realism—acceptance of the hard facts, and daily work within their narrow limits—was forced upon the nation by the unalterable conditions of subject existence.

But in literature, even before the new national catastrophe sobered all Romantics, Life and Reality had imperiously claimed their right: even while poetry produced its best in the unreal atmosphere of exile, we must not imagine literature and thought on the oppressed expanse of Poland as utterly dormant. On the contrary, it was the constant contact with day-to-day domestic realities which at this time produced at home, in ALEXANDER FREDRO, the greatest writer of Polish comedy, king of the Polish comic stage to-day more than ever, and not unworthy, for the unflagging vitality of his Polish types, to be compared with the great French model Molière. It is in the sober light of home existence, too, that novelists, RZEWUSKI, CHODŹKO, KACZKOWSKI, develop a realist instinct in following the model of *Waverley*, and making chiefly scenes from a not very distant past, within living memory, the subject of their stories and sketches; KORZENIOWSKI actually deals with contemporary problems in novels almost dryly utilitarian in spirit, though sentimentally old-fashioned in

style; and the inexhaustible KRASZEWSKI, whose novels from Polish history are the principal literary food of a whole generation, reconstructs the past with a most loving care of realist detail. And when one greater than Kraszewski came after him—HENRY SIENKIEWICZ, Poland's highest genius in the field of the novel—it was again by the life-like realism of his scenes that he succeeded in reawakening general interest among the mass of the nation in its past. It is significant of the spirit of the epoch that his most popular work—the trilogy of historical novels on the heroic struggle of Poland against her invaders in the seventeenth century—is enlivened from end to end by the most perfect embodiment of old Polish national humour in the figure of Zagłoba, the Polish Falstaff. And a later and more Romantic novel of Sienkiewicz, *The Knights of the Cross*, is even more closely in touch with actual reality, permeated as it is by a strong consciousness of the essential unity between the Homeric fifteenth-century struggle of Poland with the Germans, which it represents, and the organized resistance of the people of Prussian Poland against the Bismarckian colonization policy in the writer's own time. Here the realistic presentation of a remote past as animated by the same self-preserving national instinct as the contemporary generation, meant actual comfort, strength, and dignity to those who were bearing the heat and burden of the day.

These later efforts of Sienkiewicz, however, have carried us forward into a new and different era of the larger and less commonplace national aspirations which revived on the eve of the war. The atmosphere of the more distant, gloomy years which immediately followed the defeat of 1863, necessarily at first produced another and more severely restrained type of realism in national literature. The very notion of the historical Poland, under the Russian

censorship, had for a long time to vanish from print in a large section of the country. Poets could not, if they would, rave in their verse now on the glories, heightened by imagination, of Poland's past or future. It was the drab existence of Poland in the present that had to be dealt with, in its meanest material aspects, in a necessarily quite different style of verse, or preferably in sober prose.

And Western influence also impelled Polish inspiration along the same road in the new era. The epoch-making discoveries of *natural science* stirred most powerfully all the minds of the age, far beyond the magic circle of scientific competence, and they gave new shape not only to religious and philosophical ideas, but to social and political ones as well. The ill-digested and, in fact, indigestible *Positive Philosophy* of Comte became the fashion among the advanced youth of Poland, as it was in England in the days of Miss Harriet Martineau, and, as a new religion, it took sometimes as childish forms as in France itself. But its new light brought into prominence facts and factors not duly noticed before, both in the past and the present, in nature and in human life.

Among the factors in human life which were coming into new relief, the *working class* both in town and country necessarily acquired growing importance and interest in Poland as well as elsewhere, as the democratic theories of European Liberalism gradually gave way to the new and different democracy of *Socialist* doctrine. The stimulus given by rising Western Socialism was all the more potent in Poland on account of its now very close administrative unity and intellectual contact with Russia, where radical teaching, of whatever type, has always found a grateful soil. And social material for Socialist ideas to work upon was plentifully supplied, as Russian Poland was being deliberately developed by the Russian Government into



an intensely active industrial area, serving the needs of the whole Empire—a development originated, in fact, by the genius of the Polish Finance Minister Lubecki in the remote days of Polish self-government after the Congress of Vienna.

## II

Under such entirely altered conditions a twofold road lay visibly open both to poetry and to prose. *Poetry* could turn away from absorption in national griefs and hopes towards *universal ideas* on Man and Nature as suggested by the new and wonderful science of the age. Or it could attempt to find a new style suitable to sing, with sympathy and understanding, of the hitherto obscure *democratic forces* of society, which now were coming into play.

*Prose* again could cultivate, as elsewhere in Europe, the immense field of the *realist novel* on contemporary social problems, as opened up since Balzac, and at once peopled by a crowd of writers of many tongues. Or prose could forsake the domain of imaginative literature altogether and employ its power on the immediate treatment of urgent questions and absorbing facts of the day, become, in a word, more or less glorified *journalism*.

As a matter of fact, we now meet in Poland representative writers of great talent in each of the four fields thus marked out by the spirit of the time for poetry and prose respectively. Philosophical poetry attains heights and probes depths not attempted before, in the verse of Asnyk; the note of warm social sympathy is struck, and at the same time a new realist vision of social facts expressed, in the poems of Konopnicka. In prose, the social problem novel finds its greatest Polish master in

Prus, and journalism of the highest type has its king in Świątochowski, whose many-sided literary activity extends over the most varied domains of life throughout the whole period, and is prolonged into our own.

These four eminent writers may be singled out as exponents of the chief literary tendencies of the realist generation.

### III

It may at once be said that of the works of them all, the philosophical poetry of ADAM ASNYK is least likely to be a living power to-day and to-morrow, except in the minds of intellectual men and women, who like to move in the thin air of metaphysical abstractions. Like Earl Balfour in England, he watches all the province of knowledge of his time from too sublime a height of generalization to furnish a working creed for the many in his ultimate conclusions. Like Shelley among English poets, he eludes the ordinary reader by the lofty flight of his ideas and the Platonic ideality of his imagery. Like Shelley and like Plato, too, he is inspired by an intellectual enthusiasm which glows with white transcendent light, but a light that seems dry and cold, although Asnyk's heart is warm with human sympathies. His mystic ecstasies and sceptic bitternesses and satirical wit; his cosmic, Pantheist raptures among the bare majestic rocks and virgin snows of the Tatra mountains; nay even his rigid liberal principles and austere doctrines of enlightenment as the only means of political and social progress, are, indeed, 'caviare to the general'. And the gnomic character of his lyric poetry bars it from great popular success, by precluding ambitious works on a larger scale. Where he attempts them, he fails, as in his dramas from domestic or foreign history:

one of them has the mediaeval Roman tribune of the people, *Cola di Rienzi*, for its hero—a subject capable of appeal only to the few liberal doctrinaires among a modern theatrical audience. Even when Asnyk writes a prose play on modern life, glorifying the indomitableness of the Polish element under Prussian rule, and the power of a Polish mother's blood in a man whose father was a German—he scores but a moderate success; the play—*The Brothers Lerche*—has gone down into the limbo of the provincial and amateur stage, and is greeted there with respect, but without ardour, on occasions of national solemnity.

Asnyk remains the noble but lonely poet of *thoughts*, which do not produce a poetry 'simple, sensuous, and passionate', as Milton rightly said all great poetry must be. And Asnyk's very subtleness and sensitiveness suffuses his verse with a tender melancholy and a reflective resignation, which do not bear the robust colour of the whole-hearted moral perseverance and conviction that he preaches. The poet of positivism is a suffering and tragic figure among a materialist world.

#### IV

If Asnyk is an intellectual idealist even in his feelings, MARY KONOPNICKA, the greatest woman poet of Poland, is governed by sentiment even in her thoughts. Sympathy with the poor and oppressed, the toiling and the wronged, is her main inspiration throughout; and the sense she expresses of the growing social importance of the working-man and, above all, the peasant, is with her a matter of instinct rather than of reasoning. The new vein of social sympathy with the obscure masses is worked by the woman with even overmuch lyrical effusiveness, which is

sometimes sickening. The new style of realist poetical pictures from peasant life and country nature occasionally degenerates into mannerism in its passion for fresh and gaudy colours and racy speech. The new melody of rhythms, imitating folk song and folk music, when often repeated, cloyes by its rather thin tinkle and artificial artlessness.

But however she may exaggerate in manner, the facts are on her side. We feel that here is literature which touches bedrock of modern life, when we read her sad, grey-in-grey prose sketches of Warsaw slum existence, or her songs of the peasant's simple and natural joys, elemental stubbornness, patient endurance, and common-sense fatalism in the face of Death; finally, when we wander through her *magnum opus*, the heroic Odyssey of emigrant Polish peasants in tropical forests, *Mr. Balcer in Brazil*. There is surely 'God's plenty' to admire for the reader in this gorgeous panorama of primaeval landscapes, which the authoress herself had never seen, and yet put before our eyes in all their splendour; there is magnificent variety of human figures, men and women, all intensely alive. But there is, above all, in the towering figure of the blacksmith hero, the iron ring of unwavering confidence that these new elements in social life, however blindly they may as yet be groping their way towards their civic future, yet are undoubtedly bringers of better things for humanity at large. This unshaken confidence is a constant feature of Konopnicka's poetry, and makes this woman's singing more truly manly than the egotist wailings and decadent prettinesses of some contemporary men poets, who emulate the more recent glories of French modernism and symbolism. They observe strictly the somewhat empty *motto* of 'Art for Art's Sake'; with her, on the contrary, the social tendency of accusation and reform is frequently

rather too obvious at first, but with growing wideness of poetical range comes growing wisdom of human understanding, forbearance, and patience. There also comes growing mastery of manifold poetical form, including the Italian *ottava rima*, and enabling her to translate the Italian social poetry of her sister-poetess, Ada Negri, to record, with classical vigour and harmony, her impressions of the classic soil of Italy, with its monuments and memories and landscape, to render in verse the effect of a statue or a picture, as Rossetti did in English. In the fantastic vagaries of an unfinished epic called *Imagina* her tangled and enigmatic allegories breathe a Shelleyan charm. In a dialogue, *Prometheus and Sisyphus*, she deals even with her favourite social problems in this imaginative style of the Symbolists, but with an almost cynical strength of vision of the social distrustfulness and the majestic pain of physical labour. She had both literary culture and womanly intuition enough to turn her pen sometimes to searching and unconventional literary criticism, which boldly reaches down to the depths of personality, to praise or blame what it finds there; and she is as much a master of the harmony of prose as of many melodies of poetry. Like George Eliot, she rises in the breadth and deep humanity of her interests almost beyond her sex, and the note of *love* is nearly absent from her lyre. Love is always there, but it is the love of the 'simple souls' of humble folk, and of that modest rural scenery to which her thoughts return again and again, even when the glories of Italian art and nature surround her. Like Dickens, she embodies the democratic impulse in literature, not as an abstract theoretical principle, but as a living creative force.



## V

The same democratic heart, full of deep sympathy and understanding for every single being in the vast and seemingly uniform crowd, is throbbing in the breast of a writer who comes nearer to Dickens than Konopnicka does, not in sentiment only, but in matter and manner. Poland's greatest master in the field of the realist novel undoubtedly is BOLESŁAW PRUS (Alexander Głowacki by his real name). If Konopnicka loves, and delights in, the country and peasant life above all, Prus, like Charles Dickens, is a townsman in literature *par excellence*. There is little that is interesting to him beyond the dirty walls of the shabby old houses of Warsaw, or its close and crowded parks, and he rarely steps off the pavement of its streets in his numerous short stories and few but voluminous great novels. A townsman every inch of him, he had even certain physical defects typical of a town-dweller: he was very short-sighted, and suffered from *agoraphobia*, or nervous fear of open spaces. How these peculiarities affected his literary imagination and style has recently, and very ingeniously, been shown: the eyes of Prus, accustomed to the dull and uniform grey of the streets and the sooty brown of park trees, are not drunk with delight over the fresh colours of rural nature, as Konopnicka's are, but irritated by pronounced colours in any shape, particularly by the sunny brightness of yellow. He hardly ever dwells on such a feast to the eye as a sunset in the country, and the colours he introduces in his descriptions are mentioned in an elementary, schematic, and conventional way. He is similarly dry, prosaic and business-like in everything he says on nature in other aspects than that of colour; distinct figures are often used in a humorously statistical, matter-of-fact way; the utility of things is noticed above all, and the improvements made

by man are observed with systematic interest. There is something of the exactness of scientific record in Prus's accounts of natural phenomena, and he is even fond of employing his fantasy for extravaganzas that would only occur to the trained man of science, as in his amusing burlesque of the man who, in punishment for a light-hearted saying, was deprived for twenty-four hours of the effects of friction in his surroundings, and accordingly could neither walk, nor sit, nor lie quietly, nor hold anything in his hands, nor wear clothes comfortably, nor eat properly. In all seriousness, Prus introduces in one of his great novels the figure of a fanciful old inventor, who works out the advantages of substituting a cage-like and network structure for solid mass in objects of daily use. In another, and earlier, novel a learned professor fills a whole long chapter with his discourse on cosmogony, on the points debated between science and religion, and on the problem of the immortality of the soul. This leaning towards scientific theories, and the naturalist's accuracy and precision of thought characteristic of Prus's mind, has a deadening effect on his one ambitious attempt in the field of the historical novel—his story of Ancient Egypt called *The Pharaoh*. We feel, in its elaborately accurate archaeological detail, more of the rigid hieratic stiffness which old Egyptian civilization still retains in the eyes of the average man, than of the glow of life which vivid writings like those of the great Frenchman Maspéro, or discoveries, like those of the late lamented Lord Carnarvon, have given it in our days.

But all these peculiarities, due to the atmosphere of a scientific age, are compensated by the breadth and depth of Prus's humanity, which really makes him the great writer, great citizen, and great man that he is. If his imagination and his intellect suffer from mannerisms no less

noticeable than the different and opposite mannerisms of Konopnicka's, he has a heart as wide and as warm as hers, and as firm a perception of the things that matter in this present age of our world. Konopnicka, with a woman's motherly instinct, had written most lovingly and in a truly childlike vein *for* children; but Prus, the earnest man and thinker, wrote *on* children as nobody in Poland had written before him: it is with an insight no more of science but of sympathy that he is able to enter into, and convincingly render, the outlook of a girl of twelve on the social world in *Little Angela*, or the outlook of a boy of ten on the moral world in *Sins of Childhood*, or the outlook of a baby of one on the physical world in *The Adventures of little Stanislas*.

With the same magic sympathy he faithfully reproduces the struggle of a young woman of the modern world for an independent social position, and her struggle with feelings of personal love, in his long novel *The Emancipated Women*, a gallery of types of female psychology which is quite a unique achievement among books written by men.

The same sympathy works its enchantment wherever Prus moves among his fellow-men in or out of his sphere, whether he shows us the light-hearted and good-natured university student, as in some of his most entertaining short stories, or the decaying landed gentry and moribund aristocracy, and a shallow worldly young woman, in his most ambitious novel *The Doll*. Even such a seemingly dried-up and shrivelled piece of human nature as an old commonplace bachelor shop-assistant in the same story, reveals to us, under the magic wand of his author, a treasurer of noblest idealism in the diary he secretly keeps. And Prus goes beyond his peculiar limitations as a townsman when, in a poignant short novel, *The Outpost*,

he grips us by a tragic tale of a peasant's unconquerable endurance of the hardest blows of fate and his unshakable attachment to the soil of his fathers. Nay, this wonderful writer even overcame the limitations imposed on all of us alike by growing age, when, surviving into the troubled new world of revolutionary turmoil in Russia and Poland about 1905, he depicted with tenderest tragic pity the blundering and suicidal idealism of its boyish heroes in his last novel *The Children*.

If anything in Prus deserves to be singled out, besides that dominating and all-embracing quality of deep and broad human sympathy, it is what I should call the *social optimism*, which distinguishes and animates him as much as it does the poetess Konopnicka. We may be weary of demagogic misuse of the watchword of *Progress*, we may have lost our belief in the idea in this miserable world after the great war; but to the people of Prus's and Konopnicka's generation, hard as the times were, and especially in Poland, Progress was the idol of an unwavering faith, which only gave inner meaning to the struggles and failures, and the sufferings and the pain, of Past and Present. How consistently and undoubtingly Prus accepted this belief of his age, is perhaps best illustrated by that novel of his which is most distant from modern conditions in the outward garb of its subject. Under the allegory of an ancient Egyptian *Pharaoh*, he presents a type of ruler not uncommon in recent epochs of history: seemingly light-hearted and absorbed in the social pleasures of his court, yet enterprising and audacious in peace as well as war, convinced of the necessity of radical reforms, he falls a victim to his own traditional 'divine right', to the surrounding authorities of the existing order, which fetter him while maintaining the theory of his power. Russia, under whose absolutist

system the majority of Poles then lived, abounds in such tragedies in its dynastic story.

Yet the tragedy of the King is not, in Prus's eyes, a tragedy of the nation: the very men who, in the name of threatened law and order, opposed him and brought about his fall, afterwards carried out his own ideas of reform, with less rashness and noise and radicalism, but more securely and effectively: 'the victim has perished, but progress triumphs,' as Professor Brückner says in his account of the work. And the same patient confidence in ultimate advance is manifest in all Prus's observations on the mazes of error and disaster in contemporary human effort. Like Browning, he saw light in the spectacle to the end, however manifold and terrible the phases of it which he curiously witnessed in the course of a long life.

## VI

The same unshaken assurance of progress is the key-note of the varied and long-continued literary work of ALEXANDER ŚWIĘTOCHOWSKI (or Okoński, by his real name), whose venerable figure, like a Polish Frederic Harrison, survived from that period into our own, and still speaks out, in the clear and noble voice of his earlier work, to an altered world and a new generation, on what is best and most lasting in the ideals of the Liberal Era. Progress through enlightenment and knowledge to higher general morality, and from that, and through that only, towards a better social and political future, was Świętochowski's gospel in youth and manhood. Glorified journalist as he is throughout, he gives us a unique opportunity in Polish literature to study journalism in the abstract and almost in its ideal state, and to appreciate the ideas of nineteenth-century Liberalism on their merits, in the pure air of history, cleared of controversial mists of the day.



For, though active both in the field of the drama and the novel, and particularly fond of the kind of dialogue of which Plato and Lucian are the ancient models, and Fontenelle and Landor the modern masters, yet it was into *journalism* proper that Świętochowski threw most of his energies, first and last.

He had begun by fervidly defying the older generation in the name of the younger in *We and You*. He continued for many years, by ceaselessly fighting, in his periodical called *The Truth*, all he met with in Polish life of national, social, or religious intolerance, backwardness, sluggishness, selfishness, or obscurantism; growing more isolated in this fight when his liberal creed became somewhat old-fashioned, he took the challenging name of *The Free Veto*—an old Polish political term of unhappy memory—for the title of a new organ, and stood out against the majority with the weapon of talent in his hands. The majority of readers never could properly appreciate the masterly excellence of dialogue and philosophical freedom of thought with which, in such a work of Świętochowski's as *Aspasia*, modern problems are discussed in their eternal aspects by enlightened Greek men and women of the Periclean age. Faithfulness to high principles led Świętochowski to plead most passionately against phenomena so widely distant from each other, as the wrongs committed by European governments in the colonies—a subject too remote from the interests of the Polish reader—and the celibacy of the Roman Catholic clergy—an institution too deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of a Roman Catholic nation to be attacked with impunity. For the same reason, the author could not expect much sympathy among the masses when, in a sociological dramatic fantasy, called *Spirits*, he exposed, with Voltairean fervour, the evil works of priest-craft in history: this at a time when, both on the Russian

and on the German border of Poland, priests were effectively helping the people to organize in self-defence against oppressors of another creed.

Apart from its attacks on the priesthood, Świątochowski's dramatic allegory describes, in visionary form, the struggles of spiritual forces for mastery throughout the development of humanity—an intellectual presentation of history certainly too abstract for 'human nature's daily food'.

The obstinate old Liberal went on to make himself unpopular all round when, in a play called *Aurelius Wiszar*, he exposed socialist propaganda as abusing the credulity of intellectually undeveloped Labour: however poignantly he showed up, in the same work, the immorality of unfettered competition among the capitalists, the result could only be that both employers and employed were bound to dislike such an unbending doctrinaire. Nor could he become more amiable in the eyes of the large body of readers by his treatment of the subject of *love*. The theme is almost too much in the foreground in his views of human evolution, and under the influence of the scientific spirit of the era of Darwin and Huxley, Świątochowski dwells with unpleasant emphasis on the animal aspects of it: both antique and Christian idealization of the relations between Man and Woman are but unessential ornaments in his eyes.

By such features as this, the coldly reasoning and brilliantly witty personality of this writer compares unfavourably with the deep humanity pervading the works of Prus: Świątochowski, democrat as he is, breathes something of the aristocratic aloofness of Goethe, while Prus, equally enthusiastic for scientific progress, has not learned the lessons of Romanticism in vain, and duly appreciates the part played by feeling and illusion, by symbol and idol, in the story of the race.

## VII

The deep humanitarianism of such a typical representative of the Positivist age as Prus, seems inspired throughout by the old classical maxim of Pope: 'The proper study of Mankind is Man.' It is always on human interests, personal or social, that the writer's attention and energies are focused; and the same impression is conveyed by numerous lesser novelists of the age.

Involuntarily we ask: Where, in the midst of all this, is *Nature* itself—Nature, for which the Romantics had won equal rights with Man as a subject of literature, and which, by the science of the age, was being explored as never before, and revealed in entirely new aspects? Do writers who pride themselves on carrying the generation's spirit of exact scientific observation into literary work—do they in spite of all such protestations, treat Nature always and only with the dry scantiness and business-like short-sightedness which we have noticed in Prus? Do the Darwinians of literature, who dwell so much on the animal side of human nature, never pay attention to our cousins the animals themselves?

They do, in fact, and Polish literature has its *Jungle Books* among the works of ADOLF DYGAŚIŃSKI.

While Prus, wherever he introduces, say dogs or cows, gives them a humorous human psychology, this writer not only tries to represent animals actuated by the motives proper to them as animals, but he also, in his greatest Nature book, *The Feast of Life*, succeeds in surrounding with a halo of poetic glory and a glamour of philosophical interest the dramatic facts of 'Struggle for Life' and 'Survival of the Fittest', as established by modern research to govern the Kingdom of Animate Nature. *The Feast of Life*, Dygaśiński's last and crowning work, even

reawakens symbols of forgotten old Slavonic mythology and folk-lore, to deify the working forces of ever-living Nature throughout the round of the Seasons. But even before that, and long before Kipling, Dygasiński, a trained scientific observer of nature and experienced teacher of natural history, had patiently wormed his way into the inner life of that nearest friend to man in the animal world, *the dog*, and had given his delighted contemporaries most entertaining stories from dog society, as it gathers round a large country-house, or in an out-of-the-way Polish village. In that more ambitious Nature-symphony, *The Feast of Life*, he takes the whole of wild animal life in wood and field and air for his province, from hawk to wren, and from bear and fox to hare and weasel, and pursues it all in its everlasting Dance of Death, of Hunger, and of Love, in its struggles between themselves and with the pitiless elements, in its joys and sorrows of a short day. Far away as we are, with our social troubles of the present, from the naturalist thought of the nineteenth century, this masterly prose epic of animal life is nearly forgotten, and even Polish criticism fails to recognize it for what it is—one of the greatest Nature books of modern literature.

## IX

Polish literature, especially since the partitions, had been nothing if not *national*, being so often, and so long, all that was left of manifest and visible national life.

How does this national service and spirit of literature stand in the period we are considering here?

All the great writers who have been singled out as characteristic of the time, however preoccupied they may be with interests common to all the humanity of their age,

are at one in a vivid consciousness of their duty to keep nationality and national tradition alive.

Asnyk, the poet, not only did noble homage in verse to the shadows of the insurrectionary heroes when their deeds were remembered on anniversary days: he also did something more vital by invoking the nation 'to cease crowning its head with the faded laurels' of an irrevocable Past, and 'to go forward with the living', with a world inexorably moving on its way; and he showed how he understood this advance, when on the hundredth anniversary of the Reformed Polish Constitution of the Third of May, 1791, he founded *The Popular School Society*, which still continues its beneficent work of carrying light into dark and distant corners of the Polish country-side.

Prus, the great novelist, willingly became a journalist to serve daily national needs, and his *Chronicles* on topics of the day, contributed for many years to the *Illustrated Weekly* of Warsaw, are a body of advice on, and discussion of, current national problems, not surpassed for sound common-sense and wise love of his people.

The journalist by vocation, Świątochowski, framed flying hints on political questions into a programme of systematic day-to-day effort and constructive work in his *Political Directions*. And even under the utterly changed conditions of new, post-war Poland his patriotic voice has not been silent when needed, as when, in a memorable utterance, he wished to see his nation reborn morally as well as reappearing on the map of Europe, and pointed out with lofty eloquence, how essential moral dignity is to the worthy existence of a civilized modern nation. Not unjustly can the name of one so constantly watchful of his people's highest and noblest interests be coupled now, in retrospect, with a contemporary of his: STANISŁAS SZCZEPANOWSKI, who was active not only as a writer on citizenship, nationality,



and education, but also as a politician in self-governing Austrian Poland, while Świętochowski could only serve his country with his pen in Warsaw. Full as he is of a strong and proud sense of Polish national culture and tradition, Szczepanowski also introduces into Polish public life a largeness of ideas and breadth of views which was the fruit of study and travel in Western European countries, chiefly England, where he had worked for years as a railway engineer. It was that very wide range and constructive boldness of his thought, as applied to the problem of industrializing the rural and backward Galicia, which brought his career to a premature and tragic end. But his writings and his parliamentary speeches retain no less permanent moral and literary value than many of Świętochowski's earlier works. Both these writers together may be considered as the twin protective Genii of modern Polish patriotism: Szczepanowski presenting its more nationalist, and Świętochowski its more liberal forms, both as political classics.

But even utterly unpolitical writers of the age have an attentive eye for the nation's vital needs and social development. The great animal painter in literature, Dygasiński, is full of loving interest for the destinies of the Polish peasant in particular: he furthers the national cause of higher education of the peasant class by books and articles, he writes pathetic and mercilessly penetrative stories of the miserable life of peasants in his native district on the river Nida, and even follows the emigrant peasants himself to Brazil, to observe conditions and requirements on the spot, and raise his warning voice in a book on them.

And in the glowing enthusiasm of Konopnicka, who followed the peasants to Brazil in imagination only, in her great epic, the saving importance of the peasant element

for the future of the country rises almost into a national idolatry. If it is realized—without such illusions—in the new Poland of to-day, that the social power of the peasant is, after all, for better for worse, the backbone of the country, Konopnicka's poetry has the distinguished merit of having brought this great truth home to her countrymen and countrywomen at a time when it still needed emphasizing.

## X

Meritorious as all these distinctly national services of the great writers of the realist period were, their efforts on this side suffered from one defect common to the age: there was too little of *historical sense* in these children of a scientist generation. Absorbed in the common causes of modern humanity, they often overlook the vital connexion of contemporary Polish peculiarities with the national Past, and the equally vital necessity of keeping these connexions unbroken in the national mind.

Nor does the Polish historiography of the time supply the deficiency fully, although it produces (in the works of Szujski and of Bobrzyński, of Kalinka and of Korzon) some of the greatest books ever written on Polish history. The so-called 'Cracow school of historians' dwells too exclusively on the minute analysis of the inner faults of the old Poland as a main cause of its ruin, and by doing so, these historians end in leaving little of Polish history but a set of warning examples. Similarly, of the political tradition of struggle for independence actually nothing was left that could be considered as practical politics.

It needed the genius of a novelist like HENRY SIENKIEWICZ, and of a painter like JOHN MATEJKO, to make the glories, not only the faults of the Past, live again, and to

reawaken a just national pride in what the old Poland stood for, as an outpost of European civilization.

And it finally needed the prophetic power of the great painter-poet, STANISŁAS WYSPIAŃSKI, that Michael-Angelesque genius on the threshold of the twentieth century, to make even more of this reborn worship of the past—namely, a call to action.

In his grandiose stained-glass windows for Cracow Cathedral he showed old Polish kings and heroes in the sleep of death, and by the mighty voice of his poetic dramas he shook the slumbering conscience of the living as with the sound of a trumpet. Again and again he glorified in them the self-sacrificing heroism of the insurgents of 1830; he did homage to the active effort of the great poet Mickiewicz in forming a Polish legion of fighters for liberty on Italian soil in 1848; he contrasted the greatness of the Past with the littleness of the Present and pitilessly denounced, on the occasion of the fanciful wedding of a poet-friend to a peasant girl, the melancholy incapacity of the modern educated class to guide a strong but blind peasantry to joint national action. And he struck the topmost note of alarm in his play *Deliverance*, proclaiming clearly and boldly that mere poetical declamations on Poland's wrongs would do no longer, but a definite attempt must be made to shake foreign domination off and have a free Polish State again to do Poland's own peculiar work in the civilized world. Thus, at the height of his vision, he opened the spiritual gates of the new political day in which we live after the war.

In the new Polish Republic the appeal to historical sense made by the canvases of Matejko, the novels of Sienkiewicz, and the stained glasses and dramatic poems of Wyspiański, has undiminished power: the large problems of the new Poland must be viewed and attacked in the

historical perspective of a thousand years of unbroken national existence. But besides these long and far views there are the things around us from day to day, not less surely in importance—the necessities of the moment (and of a very difficult moment, too), common to all nations and essentially modern. Petty as some of them may seem by comparison with the great things history has gilded, they yet involve the very greatest national and social issues ultimately, and the present generation will deal with them in the proper spirit, if it remembers, now more than ever, the teachings of the heroes of *realism* in literature after the tragedy of 1863. A poet like Asnyk, read again, will give the atmosphere of great ideals to all educational policy in the new Poland; the lyrics of Konopnicka will infuse warmth of heart into the treatment of the momentous peasant problem; the novels of Prus will teach the new Poland how to develop a middle and a working class conscious of their national responsibilities; the liberal journalism of Świątochowski will keep lofty moral principles for ever before the eyes of the nation in that strife of parties which is the life of a modern State.

It may well seem unworthy of literary criticism thus to assess eminent writers of the past by the social and political value their books may have for the present and the future. Nay, it may seem at best one-sided literary history which connects literature, as I have too often endeavoured to connect it, with the background of national and political history more closely than with dominant literary and artistic tendencies of the epoch, or with the inner life of the great personalities expressing themselves in books.

But it is difficult to resist the power of social and historical associations when considering literature in this troubled, anxious, and unsettled new Europe of ours. Purely literary interest recedes before graver cares in the

contemporary mind, and values higher and more comprehensive than purely artistic ones are in the forefront of our attention now in studying yesterday, because they are at stake to-day, and must be rescued for to-morrow.

Literature saved the Polish nation in the nineteenth century, it may be called to do its share towards saving European civilization in the twentieth.



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